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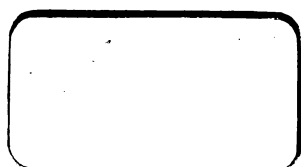
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A FIGHT FOR LIFE

BY

MOY THOMAS

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*IN THREE VOLUMES—VOLUME THE SECOND*  
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A

FIGHT FOR LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

THE ROAD TO BORLEY.

PERHAPS a gentleman less confident in his own judgment than Mr. Widgeott would have been shaken in his conclusions by a piece of news which reached that officer on the following day.

The authorities at Borley had determined to remove Carrell to the barracks, in spite of the surgeon's warning. There was a rumour abroad that the gravity of the deserter's situation had been exaggerated, and that there was a plot preparing for rescuing him once more. How or when this rumour arose none knew ; but it was observed to be strongest in quarters most frequented by the implacable Jackson, whose animosity towards Carrell was by no means lessened by the intelligence of his dangerous condition.

This was not surprising, as Jackson, like

other persons, openly talked of the fact, and, being more closely concerned in it than others, naturally talked of it more. Jackson, however, professed to know nothing of his own knowledge, except that this had somehow become the common gossip of the barracks, as indeed it had.

A report so widely spread was not long in reaching headquarters. In fact, Jackson himself felt bound to mention it to his superior officer, who reported the fact of the rumour at the adjutant's office, where he knew that the authorities would be compelled to take notice of it. For Carrell was no ordinary deserter. The story of his escape by a clever ruse from Bemfleet watch-house, and his subsequent flight in Canvey Island, had made his name a synonym for successful defiance of authority. The daring and the impunity of his evasions had already produced an evil effect on the minds of others inclined to insubordination, and the mutinous spirit prevailing at Borley had reached a point which rendered an inquiry by the Major-General of the district imminent. Though the colonel, absorbed in his desperate speculations, and in that large amount of business which is always engendered by complicated pecuniary transactions, took little heed of all this, there were others who

foresaw a storm, and were anxious. Even the mode of Carrell's last arrest had something in it which rather dazzled the minds of the daring spirits of the barracks, and his defiance of his pursuers to the last bade fair to render him a popular hero among them. All these considerations led to a determination to remove the wounded deserter from a place in which he had too many friends to be secure, and to bring him to Borley, where Jackson would answer for his safe custody.

With this view an army surgeon was dispatched to Claytersville, to report on Carrell's case, and if he saw fit, to order his removal on his own responsibility. This surgeon was a young man, and was deeply impressed with the fact that it was thought worth while to take all this trouble about a mere private of dragoons. No one had told him that his judgment was not to be as free in this as in any other case ; but there are men who are by nature fitted to be the zealous tools of the unscrupulous ; and this young gentleman so well divined the object of his mission that he no sooner saw the wounded man than he pronounced him, in spite of Surgeon Spilsby's resolute dictum to the contrary, to be so far recovered as to render it possible to remove him without any extraordinary risk.

Carrell took little heed of this news. Death had no terrors for him, and he was too weak to observe the anguish of the good old barge-man and his wife at parting with their unfortunate guest. A rude farm-cart was procured, in which the soldiers placed some straw, and arranged it as well as they could, so as to support the head of the wounded man, who thanked them with a faint smile as they laid him down on this uneasy bed. Then, with many sad farewell looks from the cottage where the outcast and wanderer had found so kind a welcome, the mournful procession set out for its destination.

The miseries of that long ride would inevitably have destroyed a man of less bodily strength than Carrell, and brought the predictions of Surgeon Spilsby to a speedy fulfilment. The jolting of the vehicle over the stones and ruts of lanes gave a horrible intensity to the pain which he suffered. But they went slowly, for the corporal and one soldier marched behind the cart to guard it, while the Irish private who had suggested sending for the doctor rode in the vehicle by Carrell's side.

In this way they travelled on hour by hour. The sun grew high in the heavens, and the heat made the torment of the wounded man still greater.

The soldiers stopped the cart at noon under a great lime-tree, which cast its welcome shade across the road, and, there sitting to eat their noonday rations, and drink their bottle of beer, they made their customary jests, and talked and laughed until the wood behind them echoed with their voices. Yet these men were not without human feeling, and they did their best for a comrade brought to this miserable condition. Now and then the soldier on foot found a little bright rill of water running over small pebbles in a ditch beside the road, and steeping a cotton handkerchief in it, gave it to the man in the cart, who squeezed some drops upon the deserter's lips, or on a sign from Carrell shed a little of the cooling moisture on his brow. When they came to a dustier road, where this relief could no longer be found, the corporal stopped the cart at the door of a cottage and asked for water. A woman brought him a glass, and the soldier in the cart, leaning over Carrell, who seemed fainting, took it from his hands and sprinkled the face of his prisoner. But for these kindly offices the tyrant Jackson had even yet been baffled of his prey.

Towards sun-down the cart had arrived within two miles of Borley, on a winding road between tall firs. The firs gave no shelter from the level

rays of the sun, except the bars of shade cast by their bare stems across the roadway ; but the day was growing cooler, and there was a delicious woodland fragrance in the air, as from a soil formed by the fallen cones and shed foliage of those giant trees. The cart stopped here awhile to give rest to the horse, and the wounded man was conscious of the soothing influences of the air, and found relief in sleep.

There was a sound of carriage-wheels in the distance, intermingled, as the carriage drew nearer, with the loud cracking of a whip. A post-chaise, with a postillion and pair of horses, was approaching, and became visible as it came round the winding avenue. The soldiers drew the cart closer up to the side of the road, for the way was narrow, and the vehicle was approaching at a great speed:

One gentleman and a lady were in the post-chaise, which slackened its pace as it approached. The lady sat back in the vehicle, but her companion rose from his seat, and, attracted by the unusual appearance of the convoy, directed the postillion to walk the horses.

‘What have we here?’ asked the gentleman in the post-chaise. ‘A man wounded?’

The postillion being unable to answer the question without closer observation, stopped his

horses just before they reached the cart, and repeated it to the soldiers. Then the corporal recognised the occupants of the carriage, and, with a salute, replied that they were conveying a deserter from Claytersville.

Until then the lady in the post-chaise had seemed to shrink from observation; but at the mention of Claytersville she looked around her. The front of the cart was turned towards them, so that they could not see the features of the wounded man.

‘How comes he in this plight?’ asked Frere, for the occupants of the carriage were Isabel and her father, who had taken their final departure from Borley that afternoon.

The corporal, unwilling to disturb his prisoner by telling the story of his offences in his hearing, approached the carriage, and whispered to Frere:

‘He was shot down for trying to escape from arrest. You’ve heard of Carrell the deserter, sir?’

Frere shook his head.

‘Maybe you have under his last name of Ishmael, sir?’ added the corporal.

Frere shook his head again, and sank into his seat as the carriage moved on; but Isabel, who heard the mention of that name, turned deadly pale. As they passed the cart she rose

and stared wildly at the face of the wounded man. Then a shriek arose in the air, which startled the soldiers, amid the rattle of the carriage-wheels.

Carrell opened his eyes, for that shriek had awakened him. He gazed after the carriage as it grew smaller and smaller in the distance, until his features grew fixed into a stony stare. But, in truth, he understood nothing of what had passed.

CHAPTER II.

BY RAIL.

WHEN the first agony of that terrible discovery had subsided, Isabel Frere sank back in her place in the post-chaise and relapsed into a mournful silence. Her father had heard nothing except that wild cry and the word Ishmael, but that had been sufficient to awaken suspicion in his mind. He remembered now that this was the uncouth name of the man who had passed two nights at sea with his daughter in the hatchboat.

‘Companionship in peril sometimes ripens into love,’ thought the lawyer. ‘Can she have been such a fool as to take a fancy to a common scoundrel of this sort—to mistake a runaway private soldier for a hero, and refuse Carew for his sake?’

The idea was almost too wild to be entertained, but there had been, nevertheless, an energy in the shriek that she had uttered which seemed to him significant.

He would have questioned her on her know-

ledge of this man ; but the truth was that he shrunk from speaking with her now. Ever since the night when he had confessed to her his scheme of marrying her to the colonel, Isabel had kept her room and avoided him, and her father had made excuses for her retirement which were readily accepted by Carew, who wished for nothing but for the affair to be arranged by the father, without any further essays on his part in that art of love-making for which he felt that he was unfitted. Mrs. Carew had accepted these excuses for different reasons, for no one was better acquainted than she was with the cause of Isabel's seclusion. 'This armed truce cannot last long,' she had thought. 'But when will this old fellow and his daughter go ?'

Frere had found in the consolations of business a balm for his wounded spirit. He had spent much time with the colonel every morning while unfolding his scheme for the Claytersville Marine Residence Company ; and in planning for the patronage of Lord Carew, who, the colonel gave Frere to understand, would favour his nephew with his name and his blessing, but not with a shilling while he lived to keep him out of the Carew property. So the time had passed, and Frere had hoped against hope, and

half looked forward to the moment when his daughter would come to him and confess her folly, and yield to his wishes. But that moment had not come; indeed, the father knew in his secret heart that it never would come. Isabel had taken into her own hands the guardianship of that honour which her father would have betrayed, and it was safe in her keeping. She was inflexible; and Frere, knowing well that haughty temper which lay concealed beneath her ordinary tenderness and sweetness of disposition, when the day came at last for their departure, had stood abashed before her. He had thought to humiliate her, but his device had recoiled upon himself. Her firm attitude cowed him, as it had done on the night when he had attempted to terrify her into submission, and had failed so ignobly. The society of his daughter had become distasteful to him, and he looked forward anxiously to the time of their arrival in London, when Isabel could spend her time in her own apartments as before, and the business of each day would furnish the means of forgetting the vexations that he had suffered.

These were the feelings with which Frere had departed with his daughter from the barracks that afternoon; but the incident of the wounded deserter, and Isabel's strange excite-

ment, had opened up new subjects for reflection. He called to mind his daughter's praises of the man whom they called Ishmael; her romantic account of his devotedness during the dangers of the storm, and the voyage of the next day; her description of him as a man of better education and more refined manners than the class to which he appeared to belong. All this he had passed by with little heed before, but now, as he reflected on it, it appeared to him to have a peculiar significance.

'If this is anything more than mere compassion for a poor man because she happened to know him in Claytersville,' thought Frere, 'her fancy will probably be cured now she knows the sort of ruffian whom she had encouraged. But I am no judge if death was not written in that fellow's countenance. The corporal and guard will have put an effectual stop to this folly, and then perhaps this erratic young lady may return to her senses.'

All this appeared to Frere's scheming mind as rather favourable than otherwise to his projects, and he came to the conclusion that nothing but time was wanted to cure his daughter of a fancy which could not possibly have taken very deep root, for their stay in Claytersville had been of comparatively brief duration, and the

time which she had spent with this man, except aboard the hatchboat, could not have been much. He determined to write to the colonel, and tell him that although the marriage must be postponed for awhile, he had reasons for saying that his daughter's objections were probably mere girlish fancies, which a brief delay would dispel.

The real foundation for that view, however, he dared not tell him. 'How,' thought he, 'can I inform the colonel that my daughter was in love with a common soldier, turned common sailor for very good reasons of his own—in fact, with a notorious deserter, who has just made an ignominious entry into Borley in a cart?'

But of all these matters he said to Isabel not a word. 'Let her sulk with me till she is weary,' he thought. 'I can afford to wait now.'

The post-chaise rolled on towards Chelmsford, where they were to take the train to London. The minds both of father and daughter were occupied with the same subject, but Isabel's reflections were far different. She had been stunned and bewildered by the sight that had met her eyes; now she was racked with the misery of suspense. What could this story of a desperate deserter mean? Had they mistaken

him for some other, and had he fallen a victim to their error? If so, it seemed only too certain that his fate was sealed, for she too had remarked that pallid countenance, those sunken features wan and sharpened in outline, as seen in the faces of the dead.

The circumstances which she could now recall, as throwing light upon this matter, crowded upon her in a confused way, which prevented her thinking upon them for a time; but in the railway carriage, where they found themselves alone, she pieced them together, and strove hard to penetrate the mystery of Carrell's fate. The rapid motion of the train—even the sparks of fire from the engine, which flew past their window from time to time in the darkness without, seemed to have some strange sympathy with the whirl and excitement of her brain, and the ideas which chased each other through her mind. 'Oh that I were alone,' she thought, 'to think over these things.'

By-and-by, a clearer mental vision came to her. The oil-lamp which lighted the carriage had sunk low, and was flickering out, so that she could no longer see her father's face to disturb her meditations. The story of Carrell's life began to unfold itself to her with painful distinctness. That he was indeed a deserter

from the army seemed now too certain to leave a ray of hope. Had he not himself told her that he had been a wild lad—that he had abandoned home and friends, and had taken to a way of life which, as he had darkly hinted, was more repugnant to his thirst for liberty than that restraint in his uncle's house which had impelled him to quarrel and to fly? This, as she had somewhere heard, was a common history; but Carrell, while confessing himself a wild lad, had added the words, 'but not wholly bad, I hope.' She had more than once recalled that expression with delight, but there was a comfort to her now in reflecting on it which sustained her, even in the anguish of that night. 'He may have been rash, foolish, imprudent,' she thought; 'but he cannot be base. Do I not know him well enough to be sure of that?'

Then she pictured to herself again all his sufferings—his effort to escape by swimming, in which he would have perished but for Stedman's aid, and now this cruel fate which had befallen him. In spite of her remorse, there was in her heart a secret joy at the discovery that his motives for that flight were far different from those which Mrs. Stedman had imagined. Here she found the true solution of that mysterious secrecy which he had enjoined upon the Sted-

mans as to the story of their first finding him ; and here a sufficient motive for his struggle with himself to subdue his love for her.

Day by day, in her trouble and perplexity at Borley, she had waited in her solitary room for any tidings of him ; but none had come. Widgett had never returned to her with any intelligence of his having delivered her letter, or even to receive the reward which she had promised him. As she recalled this circumstance, the horrible truth smote her with a force which made her shudder. It was her letter which had destroyed him. It was this which, by some freak of destiny, had directed the authorities at Borley to his hiding-place. ' Ah me ! ' she thought ; ' why did he not trust me ? Why did he not confide to me his dreadful story, that I might have been spared this cruel fate ? '

In the depth of her humiliation, she had no longer cared to hide from herself the true state of her feelings towards Carrell ; but her dream of love was over now. She felt that, even if he lived, a gulf must separate them for ever. ' And yet, ' she reflected, ' what would I not do to save him ? I have killed him—I have done more, I have subjected him to degradation

worse than death, and loaded him with misery too horrible to be thought of.'

That night, when she found herself alone in her father's house, in that chamber where she had passed so many lonely hours, she knelt and prayed for guidance—prayed that she might keep her senses while she thought of these things—prayed that some gleam of hope might dawn at last for him, or that he might not die cursing her as the source of his misfortunes.

CHAPTER III.

AT HOME.

It will be remembered that Colonel Carew, in his letter to Cousins, the money-lender, had pointed out as a conspicuous evidence of that great sacrifice to which he was about to submit for the benefit of his creditors, that his intended alliance with Frere's daughter would connect him with the unsavoury locality of Saint George's-in-the-East.

Frere, in fact, dwelt in Wellclose Square, which is certainly not in these days a fashionable quarter of the town. At no period of its history could it have been compared with the aristocratic neighbourhood in which his rival, Cousins, flourished; but there was a time when open spaces lay between it and the eastern side of the City; and in those days substantial mansions had been erected in that part, in which lived wealthy citizens. Nay, the locality had once boasted a sprinkling of gentry, and even some noble names may be found recorded in the parish books among people who,

in the old time, married, and had children, and died in that region now so wofully fallen and degraded.

Recent times have played more havoc with the respectability of Wellclose Square than all the years that had slipped away since the fashionable folks, who of yore did not disdain to reside there, turned their backs upon the neighbourhood, and departed with their households and their chattels towards the setting sun. At first sea captains, and retired ship-builders, and rich nautical instrument-makers settled down upon the tents which these greater folks had vacated. In that time the enclosure of the square, in which stands the old Swedish Church, was still neat and trim, with a double railing and an avenue of trees. But by degrees the place acquired a forlorn and neglected appearance; grass vanished from the enclosure, and bricks, and stones, and refuse took its place. The houses fell gradually to a lower class—were let in lodgings, denied the attractions of paint and whitewash, and became haunted by innumerable children, who loitered about their doorsteps, and helped to hasten the decay of the place in obedience to the predatory instincts of the young. Since then even a lower depth of degradation has descended upon that unhappy

spot, insomuch that it would perhaps be hard for any reader who now passes that way in his daily walks to associate it with any sort of romance whatever.

Although it was in a somewhat earlier stage of its decline that Frere lived in this quarter, why he lived there at all was a question often discussed among clients and friends. It was a puzzle to them, for he was believed to be rich. But Frere himself, if he had cared to do so, could have given reasons which would not have been difficult to understand. He had made his money there; had served his time as clerk in the very house in which he lived. Associations are something, even to a mind like his. Then his business was of a kind which did not require a dwelling conspicuous in the eyes of men. If people wanted money they took the trouble to find him out. It was not with him as with Cousins. Young men did not drop in upon him at unseasonable hours, flushed and excited by losses at the gaming-tables of Saint James's, to entreat him to refit them for one more venture. Even in the days of his small beginnings, when the savings which he had accumulated were the seed which he sowed cautiously in the ways of needy clients, he had never had dealings of that kind. No young

Skelterdales ever drove wildly, eyeglass in eye, and tiger capering behind, through the mazes of St. George's in the East (horrid thought!) in search of Frere and succour.

In fact, Wellclose Square, which would inevitably have been fatal to Cousins' reputation, had been rather favourable to Frere's. It was near an outskirt where building operations were always in progress; and his business had lain much with speculators in this way. He advanced money when foundations were laid; increased the loan when walls were up; added to it again when roofs were on; dribbled out more on Saturdays to imploring masters anxious about the dreaded question of wages, and fearful of the clamour that would arise among workmen and their families at any stoppage of supplies upon that fatal day. The speculative builders, whose imaginations were, as a rule, at least as active as those of second-rate poets, dreamed of fortunes to be made in the future by this system. They foresaw all but the last stage of the process, when the interest of loans and the charges of their lawyer left nothing to be advanced upon the finishing touches of their work. Then they discovered that they had laboured not for themselves. They had ploughed, and harrowed, and

sown, but another had followed closely in their footsteps to come into the harvest. Frere took the properties of clients in the building trade thus one by one; and having christened them John Street, and Hawkins Street, and Frere Street, and the like, sold them and took both the profit and the fame.

Moreover, the house in which Frere lived was his own. He had bought the lease of it cheap from the executors of his old master; besides this, he had been anxious to avoid display. To the last he maintained the fiction that he lent not his own money, but the money of clients. Names, indeed, of these fictitious clients were, as we have already said, regularly cited in deeds of mortgage. These dummies, who privately executed acknowledgments of their real position, were brushed up on occasions and made to look like capitalists—a trifle seedy, perhaps, as capitalists sometimes are, from choice—and brought up to the great house in Wellclose Square, where the parchments were solemnly read over to them in the presence of unhappy borrowers, and where, placing their fingers on little seals of wax upon green tape, they seriously declared that they delivered these things ‘as their act and deed.’ But at other times Frere rarely saw these

shadowy personages; though, in his bills of costs, clients read till they were weary items of charges for attending upon them; negotiating with them; delivering them abstracts of title; haggling over flaws with them; laboriously removing their inexhaustible scruples, and finally coaxing them into lending the money. Frere had been taught these devices by the necessity for evading the law, and concealing the real rate at which he accommodated clients; for at this period our Legislature, while permitting all other classes to be fleeced as openly as they pleased, had in its wisdom decreed that no money should be lent on lands at a higher rate of interest than five pounds per annum for the use of every hundred pounds. The system, however, had become habitual, and the fictitious clients had gradually taken their place in every kind of transaction in which Frere engaged. For this kind of business Frere's comparatively humble appearance, though it did not prevent rumours of his wealth being abroad, was particularly fitted. Here Clayter had first found him, and had tasted of the sweets of that system. Hither Colonel Carew, in his earlier days, having then property which, though mortgaged, had still some sort of substance in it, had been conducted by Clayter. The railway deposited

the colonel within an easy distance of Wellclose Square when he arrived in London from the barracks, and it was his visits to Frere on such occasions, when in need of money, which had left on his aristocratic senses so strong an impression of the undesirableness of that locality, regarded as a residence for the future father-in-law of the heir to the title and estates of Carew.

Frere's house, however, was one of the finest of the old mansions which still remained in that locality to attest its fallen glories. It was not exactly in the square, but stood back on ground of its own. A long, low-built restaurant and lodging-house for foreign seamen, which exhibits a flagstaff bearing outlandish colours as a sign, now occupies the ground on which, till a few years past, Frere's well-known mansion stood. A wall of sooty brick, pierced with a close gate, bearing a huge knocker, and flanked by a couple of link extinguishers, concealed the house from passers-by. It was a long, red brick house of many windows, approached by a flight of stone steps, worn hollow in the middle by long use. Its courtyard, in front, was paved with stones, over which any vehicle arriving there rattled as the old porter closed the great gates behind it; but at other times the place

was silent as the grave. Three great sycamore trees standing along the wall cast a sombre shade, while their foliage lasted, even upon the upper windows of the house, and in winter shed their bark in strips, that hung down and left sickly patches not out of keeping with the mournful aspect of the place.

In this house, Isabel Frere, since her mother's death, had passed the greater part of her time. She had few friends, for her father did not encourage visitors. Her sole companion, when she sought for companionship, was the old house-keeper, Mrs. Grayson, who had nursed her when a child, and whose society was hardly more human than that of the favourite bird which Isabel kept in a cage upon her table when working or reading, or hung outside the window of her sitting-room at the back of the house, to let it enjoy the rare sunshine when the days were fine. Her father was frequently absent from home for many days, when visiting localities where there was property on which he had taken mortgages; but Isabel never accompanied him, except on those visits to the sea-side of which Frere, as has been said, made both a business and a holiday. Happy visits they had been; brief glimpses of a freedom and a joy more suited to her years than that dull seclusion in

which she spent her days in town ; but now, she thought, never more to be looked back upon without sorrow and remorse.

But she did not give up hope. Ishmael might yet live, and it might be possible to intercede for him to procure him some mercy. Her father was hard and cruel ; but he could not forget that this man had protected her in great danger, and had brought her safely home from the perils of their adventure at sea. Surely he would use his influence with Colonel Carew to obtain pardon for one who had already suffered for his faults so much. These were the thoughts which possessed her now by day and night. But how could she approach her father ? He had shut himself up in his rooms, and was angry with her still for her opposition to his ambitious schemes. And the question flashed upon her, ‘ At what price would he offer to grant her prayer ? Would he urge again the importance to her and to himself of that hateful project of marrying her to Carew ? ’ Even this sacrifice she might endure to save him ; but then she thought of the colonel’s heartless letter—of his undisguised contempt for herself and her father ; and she shuddered, and cried aloud in her misery, ‘ Oh, no ! death itself would be less bitter than that.’

She shrank still from encountering her father; but she wrote to Mrs. Carew, entreating her to give her news of Carrell. She told her of her obligations to him; her grief at the sight of him wounded; and her remorse at the thought that it was her letter which had led to his discovery: and she implored her to tell her whether there was any hope of obtaining mercy for him. That lady, being anxious to drop the whole affair of the letter, wrote her a cautious, prevaricating answer, from which Isabel could extract little, except the assurance that Carrell still lived, and would probably recover.

‘That being the case, my dear young friend,’ added the lady, ‘why should you grieve or think further about this unlucky affair? It appears that the man was a hardened villain, who brought his fate upon himself by his own daring defiance of the soldiers sent to arrest him. You are young and inexperienced. Let this open your eyes to the truth that men are not always worthy of friendship because they are, in manners, above their station; nor heroes and knights-errant because they render you some slight service. This Carrell, or Ishmael, is, I assure you, well known here. My son probably could do little for him, even if he wished.’

Mrs. Carew's letter, instead of soothing Isabel's mind, only increased her distress. She rejected as false and worthless the stories of Carrell's depravity: her instinct divined the secret of his resistance, and she saw in it nothing but his determination to die rather than submit to degradation. But now some horrible punishment hung over him—she knew not what. The uncertainty was worse to her than the knowledge of his death. So she wrote another letter to Mrs. Carew, hinting, in her deep despair, that she was tempted even to sacrifice herself—her honour, life, everything, if it could but procure pardon for this man.

Now this letter disturbed the mind of her correspondent.

'The girl is madly in love with this fellow,' thought Mrs. Carew; 'there is no knowing what may come of it yet.' Then she wrote a temporising reply, assuring her correspondent that there was no immediate danger, that Carrell was safely lodged in the barrack-hospital, where, if he recovered, it would probably be long before he would be well enough to present himself before a court-martial. 'There will be time enough then,' said the lady, 'to try to obtain some mitigation of his sentence. Trust

to me. I am to remain here for some time, and will keep you informed.'

This letter brought relief for awhile to Isabel's mind. Mrs. Carew's plans were, as usual, cunningly conceived. She thought to amuse her correspondent with vague assurances of this kind, until it would be too late for the young lady to present herself in the dangerous character of a penitent and a suppliant at the feet of her son. But, like other plans of that lady, they were not without flaws. The more ingenious the scheme the more liable to those unforeseen mishaps which require, as in the case of Widgett and the letter, a constant vigilance to counteract them. But this vigilance was now impossible, for the reason that Isabel was in London and the Honourable Mrs. Carew at Borley.

So it came about that nearly a month after the fatal day of her departure from the barracks, Isabel obtained from another source information about Carrell, which happened not to be in accordance with a soothing letter which she had only that morning received from the colonel's mother. In fact, it entirely contradicted Mrs. Carew's letter, and left her no doubt that her correspondent, whether actuated by good motives or by bad, was deceiving her. This

news came from honest Stedman, who, being in London for awhile with the barge, which was safely moored in dock in the neighbourhood of Saint George's in the East, had taken much trouble to find Isabel and confer with her on the forlorn position of the wounded man.

Stedman related to her the whole story of that struggle in the brick-field, as he had heard it from the soldiers. He told her how Ishmael's wounds had, at first, been believed to be fatal, and how it had been cruelly determined to remove him, in spite of his dangerous condition. And lastly, he told her how the man who had given information of his hiding-place was one Widgeott, who was employed in some business at Borley. Only this was wanting to confirm Isabel's suspicion. She knew now that it was indeed her love that had destroyed him.

The bargeman had been well informed on all that had passed by Captain Clayter's servant, who frequently repaired to Borley with messages for the colonel from his master. Stedman had even contrived to send a trifling sum of money to the hospital orderly, in the hope that it might induce him to be patient with the sufferer. In this way he had learnt that Carrell was slowly recovering strength ; that a court-martial would probably take place in a few

days ; that there was a profound impression of the heinousness of Carrell's offences prevailing at the barracks, and a conviction that his sentence would be one of extraordinary severity. Moreover, he had learnt that Carrell's bitter enemy, the ferocious Jackson, had openly prophesied that, once tried and sentenced, this man would never again disturb the peace of Borley Barracks.

CHAPTER IV.

FLIGHT.

THE certainty of Carrell's impending fate seemed to endow Isabel with new strength and determination. She resolved to take the dreaded step of appealing to her father. 'If he despises me—spurns me from him,' she thought, 'what then? Can my cup be more bitter than *his*?'

Frere was seated in the long room of which he made a library and office, as she entered. He received her coldly as he would have received a client who had come to make a proposition of business.

'Have you thought further of this matter?' he asked.

'Father,' said Isabel, 'I have come to you to implore you to use your influence to obtain mercy for one of whose misery I have been the unhappy cause. There are those who have resolved to murder him. A word from you may avail something. Will you refuse me this—wretched, broken-hearted as you see me now?'

Frere stared at her in astonishment for a moment, and rising from his seat, walked over to the fireplace, folded his arms as he stood there, and said—

‘You mean this man Ishmael, or Carrell, the deserter?’

Isabel flung herself upon her knees before him, and, wringing her hands, bent low to avoid his gaze.

‘I thought so,’ said the father, interpreting her silence. ‘I have guessed before the secret of your folly and obstinacy. Why am I to plead for this man, whose name is the token of my disgrace?’

‘Oh, no, no!’ exclaimed Isabel. ‘I have been foolish, perhaps undutiful. I have thwarted you too harshly—have too soon forgotten your old kindness to me; but he has done nothing to deserve your anger. I will tell you all. I believed him a gentleman, who took the disguise in which I found him to conceal his true station from my eyes. I was with him, as you know, in that time of storm and danger, saw him much at Claytersville, and, though I knew it not, in my secret heart I loved him.’

‘*You loved him,*’ repeated Frere sarcastically.

‘I will hide nothing,’ continued Isabel. ‘He

was kind, considerate, faithful ; there was something noble in his manner which attracted me. Forgive me. I was too happy in the life I passed there. It was so great a change from this solitude. Everything conspired to make me love him. But he said nothing, never sought to win my love by word or deed. I parted with him coldly—even harshly—playing a part to stifle a feeling which I dared not trust. If he had pressed me at that moment, if he had but spoken of love, he must have wrung from me a secret which had made me blush ; but he was too generous to deceive me ; he was too good to wish to drag me down to the level of his misery.'

Her sobs stifled her utterance, but Frere had no compassion. He looked at her with that wolfish expression which was peculiar to him when angry, and said, in a voice which made her tremble—

'Is this the secret of that scorn you heaped upon me at Borley? Taunting me with caring no longer for a daughter's honour? Honour, forsooth! where is that honour now? And is this the story with which you would have me go to Carew, and beg for the life of this vagabond? What, tell him that your lofty contempt for his offer of marriage was based on nothing

but a degrading passion for one of his ruffians—one of the scum of the barracks—a common soldier, and a deserter. Go.'

'Father, father,' she exclaimed passionately, 'call me what you will; ascribe to me any baseness. I am weary of my life; the very daylight is hateful to me. I care not to defend myself, but spare him, for he has committed no crime deserving of this cruel fate. I know his high spirit, his honesty and truth. He is as strong as a lion and as brave, and brave men are always truthful. Oh, if you could but know him as I do!'

But Frere's patience was exhausted.

'Enough,' he said in a loud voice; 'I will hear no more of this folly. Go now,' he continued, as Isabel strove to rise; 'get to your room, lest I should be tempted to strike you in my rage.'

He made a movement, as if about to carry out his threat. His daughter shrieked and cowered before him, but he stayed his arm.

'Even this,' murmured Isabel, 'I could bear for his sake.'

She rose and walked slowly from his presence. Her heart was too full of the thought of Carrell's danger to dwell long on the remem-

brance of her father's harshness. How to save him? This was the question that rang in her ears. Had she done all that it was possible to do? Would prayers, entreaties, bribes, avail? She knew not; but an irresistible impulse seemed to drive her back again to the scene of his sufferings. 'Colonel Carew would despise my appeal,' she thought; 'his mother has shown herself false to me. It may be that they would thrust me from the place with insult and mockery. But I cannot stay here. Tomorrow I must go hence.'

She took no counsel with any one, but that night made some simple preparations for her journey, and lay down to rest.

She was wearied with weeping, and soon fell asleep. But her sleep was feverish and brief. She was haunted by distressing dreams. In one of these she was once more with Carrell on the sea, and saw him struck down and bleeding on the deck. And again that vision of the man in the cart came before her eyes with horrible distinctness; then she saw Carrell led forth blindfolded by two men, who bade him kneel, and levelled their guns at him, while she rushed in between them, and falling down at his feet, implored forgiveness. She awoke terrified, and dared not turn to sleep again.

It was late, and all were at rest in the house save her. She arose and lighted a little taper, looked at her time-piece, and found that it was two o'clock. The night was dark and chill. From her room she could see far and wide over innumerable housetops ; but no light met her eye in any of the windows save in one, where a feeble glimmer betokened the presence of some sick inmate.

Her restlessness increased. It seemed to her that she could find no peace except in the effort to reach Borley again. Why she went thither, or what she could do when there, were questions still unsolved. Her whole purpose was vague and confused. She knew well, too, that there were no conveyances at that hour. But an uncontrollable instinct led her to fly.

She dressed herself hastily in deep mourning attire, which she had worn for her mother's death five years before. Then, unlocking a small desk, she took from it a purse of gold. She opened it, and counted on the table fifty sovereigns, the fruit of long saving, for in her secluded life she had known no need of money until then.

'It would be little enough,' she muttered, 'for the ransom of his life.'

The thought struck her that it might be

possible to bribe some hospital-nurse. In her ignorance of barrack-life, she was not aware that all the duties of nursing in barrack-hospitals are performed by soldiers, and she had a wild notion that perhaps some woman engaged in this duty would pity her, and, partly from compassion, partly from a poverty that could not resist temptation, might consent to aid her in some scheme for his release.

With this idea, she unlocked a drawer and took from it certain trinkets she possessed, including her watch and some gold ornaments, chiefly presents from her mother and old friends in happier days.

She trembled as she hid them in the pocket of her dress, and even looked around her, as if she had been engaged in some shameful act, and dreaded prying eyes.

Then all being ready, she stepped out upon the landing and listened for awhile. No sound came up the great well staircase except from the ticking of an eight-day clock in a recess of the vestibule below.

She passed her father's room, and went by doors of chambers long shut up and neglected; for nearly half the rooms of the great house were unfurnished. The stair creaked slightly

behind her as she stepped on to the pavement of the hall ; but she had no fear.

The house door, massive, and studded with nails, was fastened with a huge chain, which she lifted from its hook and dropped gently. The rusty links clattered, but still she felt no fear. The great key in the lock taxed all her strength to move it ; but it turned at last, and the door stood open.

A large mastiff had his kennel in the courtyard. He was loosened at night, but he knew his mistress, and came sniffing at her dress, and licking her hands.

‘Poor Trust,’ she said ; ‘keep good watch to-night.’

Then pulling the door towards her with a gradually increasing effort, the catch of the lock slipped into the box, and fastened it with little noise.

The walls of the yard made the darkness deeper even than the night without. The long windows of the house, as she took a last look at them, were black and spectral, and there seemed to her fancy to be strange faces peering through the glass to watch her. The few remaining leaves on the sycamore trees rustled from time to time in the light breeze. The dog started at

the sound and uttered a low growl. Then a noise, as of some cart or waggon afar off in the streets, made her pause awhile and listen. After that all was silent again, within and without.

There was a little wicket in the centre of one of the great gates, which opened with a spring. She touched it cautiously, and peeped out into the street. It was a cold October night. The square was silent and deserted as she closed the wicket behind her and stole away.

CHAPTER V.

PENANCE.

It wanted still more than two hours to daylight as Isabel Frere hurried on through the deserted streets. She had but a vague notion of the direction in which she was going, but in her journeys to Chelmsford she had learnt that the railway kept nearly in a line with the high road that passed through Stratford and Ilford. How to find her way into this road she knew not, and she dared not enquire from any late passer-by, for she dreaded lest her appearance should attract attention ; perhaps lead to her being arrested and taken back to her home. It was not until she had traversed many streets and byways that she could divest herself of the fancy that some one was following in her footsteps. Once she had been so convinced of this that she had quickened her pace into a run. While escaping from her father's house, and while detection was imminent, a stubborn determination to accomplish her object had nerved her ; now, when she found herself free, her womanly fears returned

more strongly than ever. But there was no faltering in her purpose.

She was passing through one of the most lawless quarters of the town—through streets and alleys where crime and violence had their natural home, and where, even in broad daylight, no passenger was safe. In some of the houses she heard the loud voices of people in angry discussion even at that hour. At one door a man in the dress of a seaman was knocking violently and uttering horrible oaths; at another house a woman dressed in shabby finery rushed out of an open doorway, quickly followed by a man, who came up with her as she gained the opposite pavement, and struck her shrieking to the ground. Isabel passed these scenes in mute terror, but no one molested her. Some good angel watched over her that night.

After awhile she found herself in a lane so dismal and forlorn, so weird and strange, that it seemed to her fancy more like a continuation of those scenes which had tormented her in dreams at home that night, than any real place she had ever seen before. It was a narrow paved way, between high perpendicular brick walls, and was lighted here and there by a lamp projecting from the sides upon an iron rod. The lamps gave a weak light, which was more hideous than

total darkness, for their glass was cracked and broken, and the flame flickered and threw wavering shadows on the ground as she passed. The air in the lane was close and unwholesome, like that of a spot in which sunlight rarely comes, and damp and green mould form upon paving-stones and cling to walls. The passage was full of windings, which had concealed its wearisome length until she had traversed a considerable portion, but she pursued her way in obedience to that wild impulse which compelled her to go forward still. High up the walls inclined inward, and were only prevented from toppling over by iron supports from side to side, the bars of which, plainly visible overhead at regular intervals, gave a still more singular and fantastic aspect to the place.

She walked faster, till the sound of her footsteps rang from wall to wall with a hollow reverberation that was like unearthly laughter following closely at her heels. With the terror of this notion she quickened her pace again, and at length ran wildly till she issued into a similar lane, which passed the first at right angles.

Here there seemed no exit either way, the transverse lane terminating at both ends in great warehouses with many floors. At the foot of one of these warehouses was a barred door over

which she could read by the light of a lamp the inscription 'Emigration Office,' but the place seemed deserted. Looking upward, she saw a gigantic bowsprit projecting over the lofty wall, far across the passage where she stood; and above this the tall masts and spars of a vessel in some dock stood up against the sky. But neither from the warehouses nor the ship came any sound of life. Everything about her was silent, solemn, massive, overwhelming to the senses from its height, and vastness, and repose.

No course was left for her but to return, and pass again through the winding passage. How her heart beat now! She lingered for a moment, and peeped into the lane through which she had come. Her teeth chattered with fear: wild fancies haunted her. The high walls appeared to rock, and threatened to come down in thunder, and crush her where she stood. Her senses seemed failing her as she fell upon her knees on the damp stones and prayed for strength.

The effort restored her courage as she rose, and running, as before, with echoing footsteps, came at length into the streets again.

The adventure which had terrified her so much had not been without fruit. She had

learnt now in which direction and how near the river was. She remembered that from the high road which she was seeking the tall masts of shipping showed in a winding line far off upon the right. From this she knew that she had wandered too far southward, and so shaped her footsteps in another way. After a while she crossed a swing bridge, over the entrance to a dock, and entered a neighbourhood of unfinished houses, among fields and market gardens. The day began to dawn as she passed down a byway between deep ditches. As the welcome light increased she could see the line of a high road, along which carts were moving now and then with a clattering noise. She soon gained this road and followed it eastward; but she still shrank from enquiring her way. Now and then she glanced at the inscriptions upon market carts; but they bore no names of localities except those which were strange to her.

Still she struggled on with no wavering. She knew that colder natures would impute her flight to waywardness and folly, would censure her for abandoning her home; would regard her feeling as degrading and base, as her father had done: but all this she was ready to bear for the sake of that object which she had set before her. The conviction that Carrell, who

had defied the soldiers even when their weapons were pointed at his heart, would rather die than submit to degradation, the certainty that, if this resource failed him, the terrible Jackson, of whose threats Stedman had told her, had resolved to murder his unfortunate victim, and finally the reflection that she was the cause of these horrors, filled all the little world of her thoughts and feelings, and sustained her so that she scarcely felt hunger or thirst or weariness throughout that memorable journey.

Even the terrors that had beset her path brought comfort to her mind as she looked back on them. The fancy that she was suffering for the sake of one upon whom she had inflicted so much misery upheld her ; the consciousness that she must be progressing towards the spot where he lay wounded, imprisoned, persecuted to death—the thought that each moment brought her something nearer to him—the sense of a self-inflicted penance for her involuntary error, brought relief, gave a peace to her spirit far different from that wild unrest which had troubled her unceasingly until she had made up her mind to fly.

As the morning advanced she passed through a little village, where a woman at a cottage gave her milk to drink, and directed her to take

a cross road which would lead, she told her, into the highway to Chelmsford. The woman looked after her as she passed on her way.

‘Poor thing,’ she muttered, ‘she seems troubled. And in deep mourning, too.’

Isabel’s spirits rose when she gained the highway, and passed milestones showing the distance to Romford, which she knew was in her road. Near that town she ventured to enquire of a man who was leading a horse how far it was to Borley.

The man eyed her curiously, and asked if she wanted to go there. Isabel replied that she did, and begged him to tell her how she could reach it most quickly.

‘I doubt if you’ll beat the railway,’ said the man. ‘Get on into the town, and take a lane to the right, beyond the brewery. You’ll find the station soon. Get a ticket for Chelmsford; and then, if you can afford it, take a fly.’

Isabel thanked him, and hastened on till she found the lane and the station he had mentioned.

The clerk at the station told her that a train from London was then due, and demanded sharply, ‘What class?’

She wavered for a moment. To part with one of the coins which she had brought with

her for a sacred purpose seemed to her almost a sin. A miserly feeling, which she had never known till then, compelled her to answer—

‘I wish to ride as cheaply as I can.’

‘All right. Third class,’ exclaimed the man, as he took her money and handed change and ticket through the little pigeon-hole.

The snorting sound of the approaching train was audible as she hastened up the flight of steps, trembling lest she should be too late, and so lose precious time. There were but few passengers going from Romford further down the line at that hour; but the carriages were nearly all filled. Isabel walked along the platform looking into each, until she found a compartment, all the occupants of which, save one, were women. She chose this carriage, and, stepping in, soon found relief again in the rapid motion of the train.

The women who occupied the carriage were clean country folks, some of them returning from market, and most of them carrying baskets or bundles. They looked at her for a moment, and recognised her, in spite of her sombre attire, as a lady. It was evident that her presence embarrassed them. But they did not annoy her with any tokens of vulgar curiosity, and Isabel’s thoughts were too far away to remark

anything of this. She dropped her veil, and shrinking into a corner of the carriage, listened for the announcement of every station, and wondered how soon she would be at her journey's end.

Meanwhile, the man who had by some accident found himself thus alone in the society of female passengers, sat quietly in his place on the opposite side of the carriage. He too occupied a corner, but at the other end of the compartment, and from this position he watched the new-comer with profound attention.

He was a tall, bony man, in a blue smock-frock, of the kind which is worn by butchers. A butcher in a third-class carriage of a train from Romford is not so rare a sight as to attract much attention; but there was something remarkable in the frame and general appearance of this man, and in the eagerness with which he observed every movement of his opposite neighbour, and stretched forward to listen for the sound of her voice when she asked a guard to tell her how far it was still to Chelmsford. It would have been evident to any one less absorbed in thought than Isabel, that this passenger, from the time she had entered the carriage, had regarded her with deep interest,

though he said nothing, and, after having apparently satisfied his own mind of the correctness of some notions he had entertained about her, sat back again. When Isabel raised her veil for a moment, he turned his face to the opposite window, and appeared now to be anxious to avoid observation. But his pains were needless. Her mind was too much occupied to take any notice of his presence.

Arrived at the station, she bargained with a man to convey her in a fly, and leave her within a short distance of Borley. The distance was considerable, and the price which he demanded was a far more serious draught upon her resources than the railway fare. She hesitated; but finally pulled forth her purse and drew out the money. The driver fixed his eye upon the purse, which was elegantly worked and embroidered, and which showed through the meshes of its knitting the shining store of gold within. As Isabel stepped into the open vehicle he leaned back and said in a low voice—

‘Keep a sharp look-out, miss, when you show a purse like that. A man has been watching you since you left the station. I saw him step out of the same carriage as you did, as I was there just now looking for a fare.’

Her face flushed. 'What man? Where?' she asked anxiously. 'Is he watching now?'

'He's just gone into the stables at the railway hotel,' said the driver. 'A tall man. Looks like a butcher, miss. Didn't you see him in the train?'

Isabel answered faintly, 'No;,' but at that moment a dim remembrance came to her of a fellow-passenger who sat at the other end of the carriage without speaking, during the whole of the journey.

'Thank you,' she added. 'I do not know him. Drive me fast, please: that is all.'

The man touched his horse with the whip, and the fly set out at a sharp pace. Isabel dared not look behind lest the terrible apparition of the tall man should appear again. Who could he be? And why should he watch her? It could not be for the sake of her money, as the driver had supposed, for she had never exposed her purse until then, except at the station, where this man certainly did not enter the train with her. Then the terrifying thought came to her that the driver himself might molest her—perhaps rob her on the road; and she deplored her own imprudence in exhibiting her purse before strangers.

She had journeyed nearly two miles, when

she heard the sharp patter of a horse's hoofs behind her. The rider was evidently gaining upon them. Could this be the mysterious man who had travelled with her in the train? Her heart beat fast. What if her father had guessed her purpose, and despatched some one at an early hour to intercept her? It would have been a strange fate indeed if she should have entered at Romford the carriage in which this man journeyed; but not more strange than some of the coincidences by which she had recently been persecuted. It was a relief to her when the horseman overtook the fly and passed it without taking any notice of the driver or his passenger.

Isabel observed that this man also was of a tall figure; but his attire was altogether different from that which the driver of the fly had described. He wore no smock, but only a simple jacket, and from his clothing might have been taken for a farm servant. His fast-trotting horse soon carried him ahead of the fly. Isabel watched him to where the road ascended the hill in the distance. His gaunt figure and the outline of his horse stood clear against the sky on the brow of the hill, and then, descending the other side, gradually disappeared as if sinking into the ground.

CHAPTER VI.

TRIALS.

It was not long after noon when Isabel Frere came to the end of her long journey. As soon as a turn in the road had revealed to her the distant buildings of the barracks, she had ordered the driver of the fly to stop, preferring to arrive there on foot, in order to avoid observation. The day was bright and cool; but she was heated and dusty from her long journey. An orderly answered her at the gate of Colonel Carew's quarters. She had seen the man before, but he did not recognise her now in her mourning attire, and she kept her veil down while she asked whether she could speak with Mrs. Carew.

The man surveyed her from head to foot, noted her dusty and travel-stained appearance, and made up his mind at once that the lady would not be a desirable visitor. 'Probably,' he thought, 'one of the people from Chelmsford, who call for subscriptions now and then. The colonel's mother warned me to keep them off.'

'What's your business?' he enquired sharply.

‘It is a matter of great urgency,’ pleaded Isabel. ‘I am known to Mrs. Carew, and she would see me, I am sure, if she knew that I am here.’

‘Give me your name, madam,’ said the man.

Isabel hesitated. ‘Say,’ she murmured, ‘a friend from London.’

‘With no name?’ asked the man sarcastically.

‘My name is not important. Oh, pray tell her some one is here to speak with her,’ urged Isabel imploringly.

This piteous appeal only served to convince the orderly of the correctness of his suspicions. ‘I’m very sorry,’ he said, ‘but I can’t do it. Mrs. Carew is engaged, and desires no visitors to-day.’

‘Colonel Carew would see me,’ she suggested, rendered desperate by the man’s obstinacy.

‘He couldn’t very easily,’ replied the orderly. ‘He is in London on leave of absence just now.’

Isabel turned away with a sinking heart. She dared not offer him money, lest her anxiety should attract still further attention. There seemed no course left but to watch the road to the barracks in order to see Mrs. Carew when she went out for her customary drive, or to pass the grounds of the house in the hope of

observing her walking in the garden. The afternoon passed in this torturing suspense, but still she obtained no sight of the lady. It was but just sunset, and from the heath over which she had looked so often when staying at the barracks she could already see lights twinkling in the windows of the colonel's house. One appeared in the casement of Mrs. Carew's own apartment, which Isabel knew so well; she could see it plainly between the great oaks that hung over the ha-ha which separated the road from the lawn in front of the house. It was so short a distance from the roadway that she could almost have made her voice heard by any one there; but the blind was drawn down, and she could see no one. She determined to enquire at the gate again, but as she approached for that purpose she caught a glimpse once more of the surly orderly, who, released from domestic duties by the colonel's absence, was quietly enjoying a cigar on a rustic seat upon the lawn, and again she turned away.

Her trials seemed more than she could bear; for she was not aware that this delay in finding admission to the house had already saved her from detection. During the time that she had lingered in the neighbourhood, a telegraphic message had been received from London by

Mrs. Carew, informing her of Isabel's flight, to which that lady had replied that no tidings of the fugitive had reached her.

After awhile, Isabel approached the gate again. The light was still visible in Mrs. Carew's apartment: the windows of the verandah were open, and the surly orderly had evidently sauntered down the garden path to enjoy the coolness of the evening. She unlatched the gate quickly, crossed the little bridge over the ha-ha, and entered the verandah unobserved. The verandah and the drawing-room were deserted as she passed through, and, stepping noiselessly up the stairs, knocked at the door of Mrs. Carew's room.

That lady received her with a satisfaction which was far from being feigned. As her son was in London, and might possibly have called on Frere, unpleasant suspicions had already taken possession of her mind. What, she had thought, if Isabel had fled to him without the knowledge of her father, for the sake of imploring favour for this man? Her appearance at Borley was, therefore, a welcome surprise. Mrs. Carew embraced her affectionately, and asked how she had arrived there.

Isabel told her frankly the story of her journey, and its object. She told her, too, how

she had discovered that Mrs. Carew had deceived her as to Carrell's fate—for her nature abhorred hypocrisy and concealment. Another lady might have been taken aback by this disclosure; but the colonel's mother was well practised in the art of extricating herself from embarrassments of this kind.

'Well, dear,' she said; 'are there not such things as pious frauds? And is it not pardonable sometimes to conceal the truth from sick people and young children? Your mind is over-heated with this matter. You do not see how hopeless it is. Come, now—listen to me. I will not let you go till you have promised me to be wiser.'

Her visitor listened to her cold scraps of worldly wisdom; but the hint she had given of the possibility of her being detained and prevented from making enquiries about Carrell filled Isabel's mind with a new alarm. In fact, Mrs. Carew, emboldened by the circumstance that her son was absent, was already meditating some such coup-de-main as that of seizing and imprisoning her for awhile, under pretence of rescuing her from the consequences of her own infatuation. She begged Isabel to excuse her for a moment while she stepped into an adjoining apartment, where her maid Clara was

engaged in needlework. Isabel's terrors were increased by this appearance of seeking aid for some purpose. A kind of horror of the woman who had deceived her, and now seemed about to destroy her last hope, crept upon her. She rose from her seat, and opening the door noiselessly, went swiftly down the stairs, and regaining the garden as she had entered—by the verandah—passed once more through the gate unobserved. When Mrs. Carew returned and found the apartment vacant, she guessed at once the cause.

‘The bird has flown,’ she said coolly. ‘But she will reconsider her determination, and come back to me once more—for she has no other friend here. Poor love-sick fool.’

Meanwhile, Isabel continued her flight till assured that she had escaped observation in the dusk. She was weak and faint; but where to find shelter or entertainment she knew not. She hastened round the plantation which separated the exercise ground from the wild heath. By-and-by she came to a stile leading into a narrow lane, where there was a finger-post. It was just light enough for her to read the words ‘To Borley,’ in white letters on the post, and she determined to go on to the village. ‘I may

there,' she thought, ' get some intelligence of him.'

The lane skirted the extensive grounds of the barracks. Through gaps in the plantation she could see the outbuildings of the place. She wondered which of these was the hospital in which Carrell lay; but she met no one, nor would she have dared to make enquiry so near the barrack.

The village was nearly three miles from the officers' quarters. As she left the enclosure behind her, the lane became more lonely still. It was the twilight of a fine October evening. The bats were out and the sky was clear, as she paused for a moment to rest, for she was very weary.

It was then that she became aware, for the first time, of some footsteps at a distance behind her. She listened, and glanced backward timidly, for she felt confident that no one from the house had followed her. The footsteps ceased; but she could plainly distinguish the figure of a man at a distance of only a few hundred yards. He stood up in a hedge, from behind which a tree cast a dark shadow; but Isabel's gaze was sharpened by her fears, and she could trace his outline plainly against the dusky foliage. He was tall, like the man of

whom the fly-driver had warned her. Her terror became so great that she felt as if fixed to the earth. What could this man want, she thought, but to rob her of her treasure, without which her last hope would be gone? This thought seemed to give her power again. The road before her was more lonely still than that portion through which she had passed, and night was drawing on; but to turn back would be to face this man, and there was no chance of escape but in pursuing her way.

So she hurried on under the dark shadow of hedge-row elms, and along by dismal plantations of young fir. She placed her hand in the pocket of her dress instinctively, and grasped the precious gold in her purse to assure herself that it was indeed there. It was safe; the trinkets which she carried were there too. She felt as if, weak and weary as she was, she could have battled for them, and only parted with them in yielding up her life. How she deplored her folly in exposing her purse to the eye of strangers now! But it was too late. The man was still behind her, and, to her terrified mind, seemed gaining upon her every moment. She fled wildly on, and lost the terrible sound in the noise of her own footsteps, and the rustling of her dress in the night wind.

Still she thought of her treasure and its sacred object. It might be possible to save it yet. In a little while she came to a gate which led into a field that lay open to the sky. It was lighter there than in the lane. Quick as thought, she darted into the field, and closed the barred gate behind her. The field, which was bordered by a wood, had been recently ploughed ; the large rough clods were visible in the furrows. She stooped down, and dropping her purse and trinkets beneath one of these clods, marked the spot by a large clod which lay there. So rapid had been her action, that it had scarcely consumed a moment of time, and it must have escaped the notice of her pursuer. Isabel shrieked as she heard him spring over the gate ; but she ran still, skirting the edge of the wood till she came to another gate, which was closed. Her strength was not sufficient to open or climb over it, and as the tall man came up with her she fell upon her knees breathless, and without the power even to implore for mercy.

‘I beg pardon for frightening you, madam,’ said the man, ‘but I was afraid of losing you.’

‘What do you want?’ she exclaimed, as her strength came back.

‘I would have followed you quietly into Borley,’ said the tall man, ‘just to see no harm

befell you on the road, and would not have alarmed you by speaking till we got there ; but you took to running for the woods, and what was I to do ? ’

Isabel had a faint remembrance of having heard his voice before ; but her senses were too confused to recall the circumstances.

‘ Oh, how you terrified me ! ’ she exclaimed. ‘ Who are you ? ’

‘ Joseph Widdett, ’ replied the stranger. ‘ Have you forgotten me ? ’

CHAPTER VII.

JACKSON'S BLOODHOUND.

THE stranger who had caused Isabel so much terror was indeed Mr. Widgeott. That gentleman was, moreover, identical with the railway passenger in the butcher's smock, whose mysterious attentions had attracted the notice of the driver of the fly.

Isabel, sitting back in the vehicle, had not seen the horseman who had overtaken her on the road until he had passed the fly, when his back was turned towards her. It is not surprising, therefore, if she had failed to recognise in him her faithless messenger, whose despatch to Claytersville had brought so much misery upon her. The horseman, however, was no other than that eccentric gentleman, whose frequent changes of attire have been already mentioned. It happened that Widgeott had been in the neighbourhood of Romford that morning in quest of a missing man, who was believed to have taken to the trade of a drover, and who was considered not unlikely to turn up at the

great cattle-market held in that town. The attire of a butcher had, for obvious reasons, appeared to Widgeott to be a convenient one on that occasion. He had been unsuccessful this time, and had followed on a false scent some miles on the road to London, where he had finally taken his place in the train to return to Borley. In the railway carriage, however, he had made a discovery which had interested him much more than the mere capture of a deserter. He had recognised Isabel's voice, and, in spite of her thick veil, had felt satisfied that he recognised her features too. This was just one of those occurrences out of the track of ordinary life in which Mr. Widgeott's mind delighted. Here was a fact to be meditated upon, a mystery to be unravelled. The colonel's intended bride, a rich young lady, was on her way to Borley alone at an early hour in the morning. More than that, she was in disguise; and in further proof of her desire to avoid observation, there was the strange circumstance of her taking a place among poor countrywomen in a third-class carriage.

Mr. Widgeott, on his trotting horse, got to Borley before Isabel; but he kept his own counsel about what he had observed, and determined to watch further until he should be in a

position to determine, as he said, 'in which direction the wind lay.' That her mysterious visit related in some way to the fate of the deserter Carrell he did not doubt; and he felt equally certain that a clue to its exact object would not be long wanting. He had seen her repulsed at the gate of the colonel's house, but had not interfered. He had enquired carelessly of the orderly, and had learnt that the lady refused to give her name, but was confident that Mrs. Carew would wish to see her. He had seen her enter the house and leave it hurriedly again. Still he had kept his own counsel, and watched Isabel's movements. It was quite true, as he had said, that his intention was merely to see her safely arrived at Borley village, and not to declare himself until then; and it was equally true that it was Isabel's sudden panic, and the fear that he should lose sight of her altogether, which had precipitated his measures. 'For come what may,' Widgett had thought to himself, 'I must have a hand in this mysterious business.'

Isabel was not much relieved at the unexpected discovery that her pursuer was the mischievous Widgett, with whose name she associated all her misfortunes. She burst into tears. 'Why do you molest me?' she said.

‘What have I done that you should persecute me thus?’

‘I beg pardon if I have erred,’ replied Mr. Widgett; ‘but I meant well. I did you a bad turn once. Trust me once more, and perhaps I may be able to repair it. Come, now, I know your secret, and the object of your visit here.’

Isabel shuddered. ‘Oh, sir,’ she faltered, ‘if you do indeed know this, you must pity me. You will not—oh, no, you will not betray me?’

‘On the contrary,’ replied Widgett, who had assisted her, with much gallantry, to arise, ‘I am your devoted servant in this matter. You doubt me? Well, you have had reason. But just think. What object can I have to serve by deceiving you? Hush!’ he added, as if the rustling of leaves in the night breeze disturbed him; ‘this is a business to be talked of in whispers anywhere.’

Then, bending low, he whispered in Isabel’s ear, ‘Be discreet, and Carrell may be saved.’

She started. It was like a voice in her own conscience, so closely did it chime in with her thoughts at that moment. But could she trust the man who had already proved so dangerous? ‘Why did you betray him?’ she asked piteously.

‘It is a long story,’ replied Widgett. ‘Ask

Mrs. Carew. She knows all. But time presses now. There will be a court-martial in a day or two, and we must act at once.'

The intelligence of the near approach of the crisis of Carrell's fate decided her. She was helpless, and grasped eagerly at any offer of succour.

'Oh, save him,' she exclaimed, 'and I will be grateful indeed. I have money, and can reward you. Come with me, and I will show you where my treasure is. It is not far from here. Just where I entered by the gate.'

Widgett followed her mechanically as she retraced her footsteps. He had begun to think that his companion's senses were shaken by her anxieties about the wounded man, and he was astonished to see her stoop down in the furrow in the field, and removing a clod of earth, take up something that jingled like coin in a purse.

'I have it here,' she said. 'I will tell you the truth. I thought you were a robber when you followed me, and I hid it. But I have other things besides to reward you with—gold, and silver, and some jewels; all these, too, shall be yours, if you will help me. Meanwhile, here is the money. You may want it—take it. I have need of little.'

She held out the purse, but Mr. Widgett, who

was anxious to give a proof of his fidelity in this instance, having handled it for a moment to assure himself of its weight, restored it generously to her hands.

‘Guard it till you have reason to reward me,’ he said. ‘Meet me here an hour after daylight the day after to-morrow. I may bring you good news; and then it will be well for you to disappear from this neighbourhood. But keep your mind easy, and your tongue silent.’

They issued by the gate into the lane again; and her companion directed her to a house in Borley, where, he said, a worthy woman would give her shelter, and procure her what she wanted. ‘It is but for two days,’ he said, ‘and no one will hear of you there.’

Isabel thanked him fervently, and tripped on with a lighter heart, while Widdett, as arranged, followed her at a distance. Under this strange escort she arrived in Borley, and found the house he had mentioned, where the old woman, satisfied by the ladylike deportment of her visitor, provided her with entertainment and a bed, as Widdett had anticipated.

Widdett returned to the barracks that night meditating deeply on the events of the day, and with a sense more than ordinarily profound of his own sagacity and cleverness. The stealth

and secrecy of Isabel's romantic adventure, her great dejection at the prospect of Carrell's fate, the mourning that she wore as for one already dead, had satisfied him that he had at last penetrated the secret of Carrell's origin, and that the wounded deserter could be no other than a scape-grace brother of the lady who was affianced to the colonel and commandant of Borley. Here he found the explanation of those conferences between the two ladies on the subject ; of the postponement of the marriage which the colonel, satisfied by the assurances in her father's letter that Isabel's scruples were mere fancies, and would soon melt away, now openly talked about. ' If this man should suddenly be missing on the morning of the court-martial,' thought Widgett, ' there will be a hubbub in the barracks; but nobody would suspect me of a hand in the matter, except the young lady, who will not forget me, I'll warrant, as long as she's the wife of the colonel. No, nor if she comes to be Lady Carew,' he thought, his mind expanding at this brilliant prospect of future favour in return for so great a service. ' Neither would the colonel, I fancy,' he continued, ' be sorry in his secret heart if he came to know all. Joseph Widgett, you are a made man ; for the thing can be done. Ay, shall be done,' he muttered,

striking his side, as if in ratification of that compact with himself.

The bugle was sounding the signal for lights to be extinguished in the barracks, as he came up again to the outer ring of the great enclosure. He looked for a convenient spot, and sprang over the fence with that agility for which he had been almost as famous as Carrell himself. Here he crouched down among the fern in a copse which had formed part of the wood that had originally covered the whole extent of the barrack grounds. From this point he saw the lights disappear one by one from the windows of the soldiers' quarters in the far distance. No lights were now visible except in the back part of the officers' houses, far away across the walls and gardens, and in a long, low-built brick building where lamps still glimmered feebly in two places.

It was towards this latter building that Mr. Widgeott's attention appeared to be chiefly directed. When all seemed quiet he stole out of his lurking-place, and advanced towards it across the portion of heath which was used, where cleared of furze and broom, as an exercise ground for recruits.

He was approaching what was evidently the

back of the building, for there was no gateway on that side in any part of the long wall which separated the yard or garden from the grounds without. There was a ring of young firs within a short distance of the wall, which Widgeff now entered. They were straight and tall as the masts of a sailing-boat, and their rough bark afforded good hold to the hands. Having chosen the most convenient one for his purpose, he succeeded in raising himself to a considerable height by that process of climbing which is known as 'hand over hand,' until he gained the support of a branch, whence he could look through the foliage without much chance of his figure being observed.

He made a careful scrutiny of the building before him, and discovered the fact that there was a third window from which light also issued. It was a long window on the floor of the building immediately above the kitchens which formed the basement. The light in it evidently came from no lamp within the apartment. It was a pale, diffused glare, looking as if passing from above, through some fanlight or grating. Mr. Widgeff's quick eyes immediately detected the fact that this window, unlike the others at which lights appeared, was crossed by long perpendicular iron bars.

‘Beyond doubt, that’s the cage that holds our bird,’ he muttered.

But his survey was not yet concluded. He recommenced his climbing, and gained a higher spot, from which he could look over the wall at a sharper angle, and there, aided by the pale illumination from the window, he could just perceive the fact that the wall on the inner side was bordered by a fosse, which rendered it higher within than without.

‘I fancied so,’ remarked Mr. Widgeott to himself, as he descended and stealthily approached the wall. He walked along it in the deep shadow, and gained the other end of the building unobserved. ‘All quiet here,’ he thought.

To reach the top of the wall from the outer side was not very difficult for a man of his height. Widgeott returned, and finding a convenient spot, sprang up and clutched it. By this means he raised himself to the top, and sat there awhile looking downward into the fosse.

It was fortunate for that intriguing officer that he paused awhile at this point to reconnoitre the position. A low, deep growl met his ears, and instantly a ferocious dog sprang out of the shadow of a pile of planks stored in the ground below. The animal did not bark ; but

his growl, as he flew at the wall and tried vainly to jump to the height from which Widdett was contemplating him, was only the more terrible.

‘Curse that brute,’ muttered Widdett.

But another disturber of a more dreaded kind was now approaching. He could now plainly distinguish footsteps as he shuffled down the wall and prepared to drop to the ground again.

‘Who’s there?’ cried the stranger, as he clasped the intruder round the body in a way which rendered him powerless for a moment.

Mr. Widdett recognised the voice in an instant. It was that of the terrible Jackson. He had, indeed, dropped into the arms of that dreaded garrison sergeant-major, more ferocious and bloodthirsty than the animal that had drawn attention to the figure on the wall, and that had procured for his master the famous nickname of ‘Bloodhound’ Jackson.

CHAPTER VIII.

PREPARATIONS.

IF it had happened to any other man than the mysterious Widgett to be detected by Sergeant-Major Jackson in the very act of climbing the wall of the barrack hospital at night, it is probable that that circumstance would have somewhat disconcerted him. But Widgett was not easily taken by surprise. To the sergeant's question of 'Who's there?' he replied coolly—

'Widgett. Didn't you know me?'

'Not a bit,' replied the sergeant. 'What are you doing here?'

'Jackson,' said the other, in a tone of confidential suggestion, 'are you quite sure that the guard-ward is safe?'

'I'll answer for that,' returned Jackson. 'Why should you doubt it?'

'Why?' enquired Widgett, with an air of innocent surprise. 'Didn't you hear the dog growl?'

'He always growls when he hears a footstep along this side after dark,' answered the sergeant. 'Is that all?'

‘Nothing more. I was returning this way from Borley, heard the growl, and jumped up the wall to look over.’

‘And what did you see?’

‘Nothing, except the dog, who sprang out like a tiger when he heard me.’

‘Exactly,’ replied the sergeant, who would have resented this insinuation of the incompleteness of his arrangements if it had come from anyone but Widgett. ‘Leave that to me,’ he continued. ‘Our slippery friend is safe enough this time. I would defy the strength of ten men to open his window more than a foot high; not to speak of solid iron bars outside. He used to brag of his muscles, but he is not exactly a giant. A couple of bullets through the body, and six weeks in bed, isn’t the sort of training to fit a man for breaking out of the guard-ward.’

‘Have you no sentry on this side?’ enquired Widgett.

Jackson laughed. ‘To be sure I have,’ he said. ‘The best sentry in the barracks too. Hasn’t he just given you a taste of his growl?’

Widgett laughed in his turn at the sergeant’s joke, and the pair sauntered on together discussing the probable result of the approaching court-martial. Widgett satisfied himself that

Jackson's suspicions were asleep, notwithstanding the curious fact which the accidental circumstance of his taking a stroll on a fine evening round the exercise ground had led him to discover. The sergeant, indeed, set the whole affair down to the excessive zeal and meddling disposition of the spy. How, indeed, could Jackson suspect his friend Widgett of any design to rescue the man whom he had hunted down with such perseverance and success?

Though Widgett, misled by his conceit in his own powers of guessing, had made some serious mistakes, he had undoubtedly a talent for intrigue. After this unfortunate encounter with Jackson, most men in his situation would probably have thought it prudent to withdraw from the affair. Common plotters would have been thankful for their escape from such an embarrassment, and would have determined to afford no subsequent clue to the real purpose of their proceedings by attempting them again. But Widgett, after much cogitation on the situation, came to the conclusion that not only was he as much at liberty to act as before, but that in fact he, and he only, was the man who could make an attempt to rescue Carrell with almost a certainty of impunity.

‘Dogs,’ he reasoned, ‘are easily disposed of,

and walls can be scaled without much chance of observation if you don't begin too early.'

Having settled these important preliminary axioms, Mr. Widgett, on his way home, went deeper and deeper into meditation on the subject.

He had determined that a fondness for meat, and an incapacity for analysing any food presented to him, constituted weak points among the qualifications of Sergeant Jackson's ferocious sentry. The dog, he considered, might be put out of the calculation as an obstacle so easily disposed of as hardly to be worth a moment's consideration. Then, as to climbing the wall from the outside, it was certainly practical enough; and though he did not know exactly the depth of the fosse, it must be deep indeed, he reflected, if, with the aid of certain appliances, his long figure and unrivalled agility did not enable him to drop down with nothing worse than a shaking. Once within the hospital garden, a plank selected from the pile, and placed across the fosse to the top of the wall, would secure an easy retreat.

But it was in his review of the various contingencies consequent upon his being discovered, if he should be so unfortunate, in the midst of the proceedings which he contemplated, that

Mr. Widgett's genius for intrigue chiefly displayed itself. The more he looked at the case the simpler it seemed.

As for example : what could result from his being discovered on the wall, beyond a proof of his excessive vigilance and his incredulity on the subject of the security of the prisoner? And if found within the hospital enclosure, what easier than to make the silence of the dog, who would certainly be silenced before Mr. Widgett ventured to drop into his den, an excuse for climbing over and examining the place? Even if detected while busied at the guard-room window, how simple to give an alarm at once, and even to point to his own work as evidence that he was right after all in his suggestion that an attempt at rescue might be made? And then what a triumph for his own reputation for sagacity and forethought, to figure as the man who had discovered and frustrated the attempt, in spite of Jackson's confident assurances.

Having reduced the whole scheme to something approaching to perfect safety for himself, with rewards and advantages, immediate and prospective, of an almost unlimited character, Mr. Widgett's mind relapsed into a state of peace and self-satisfaction, to which for some time it had been a stranger. In truth, he had

lately been unfortunate in his schemes. The Claytersville business had involved him in disgrace with Mrs. Carew ; the Romford affair had been a failure ; but now came this grand manœuvre in the field of what military authorities call ' haute stratégie ' to solace and reward him for all disappointments.

He trudged on the road that night whistling cheerfully to himself, till he came to a cottage on the outskirts of Borley village, where, letting himself in with a key without disturbing anyone in the house, he supped heartily, and retired to enjoy a sleep which refreshed and prepared him for the labours of the next day.

He rose betimes on the following morning, and busied himself in certain preparations, the precise object of which it might have puzzled a stranger to determine. Some of these consisted in the knotting and platting of cords, and making them fast to double hooks, which had hitherto served the purpose of suspending flitches of bacon of his own curing from beams in his kitchen. Others consisted in the selection of clothing from a rather considerable but somewhat faded wardrobe in his possession, for Mr. Widgeott, as has already been said, combined with other pursuits that of acquiring by gift or

purchase the left-off attire of officers and others. In the way of disguises his resources were, indeed, almost unlimited, and it would not have been difficult for him to have undertaken the outfit and preparation of a masquerade of moderate proportions. On this occasion, however, he seemed less intent upon the selection of a picturesque or peculiar costume, than on the object of providing a suit as like that of a gentleman as anything that a wardrobe of cast-off clothing could afford. Having selected the various articles required with much care, and considered their length and other proportions by measuring them, with due allowances, against his own stalwart form, Mr. Widgett surveyed the heap, but was not yet quite satisfied. His mind, in fact, appeared to be intent upon an almost ideal standard of completeness; shirt, cap, and boots were added, and even such luxuries as a neckcloth. Nor were his preparations yet quite concluded. He determined, like a bold speculator as he was, even to invest money in the venture in which he had embarked, and accordingly, taking out an old leathern purse from a drawer in the chamber in which he had slept, he deposited in it no inconsiderable amount of hard cash, that had been honestly and legitimately acquired by him in the pursuit

of his lawful calling. It was certainly not without a pang that Mr. Widgeott divested himself in this way of so precious a commodity, and placed it in the pocket of one of the garments referred to; but he thought of Isabel's purse of money and her articles of silver and gold, not to speak of the jewels, with which she had promised to reward him.

'The young lady,' he thought, 'won't forget that I gave something for her money.'

The most perfect plans are apt to have weak points; and Mr. Widgeott's were no exception to that rule. His resources were so extensive that he had at first expected to be able to complete his preparations without any of that assistance from without the necessity for which has so often brought plots to exposure and ruin. The clothes were ready, and made into a convenient bundle; the knotted cords and hooks were complete; more than that, he had been able to provide himself out of the spoils of his rogue-catching profession with a very useful implement, well known to housebreakers—to wit, a short crowbar, of excellent steel, with a flattened end as hard as adamant, and nearly as trenchant as a knife. But there was one item still wanting, and this happened to be an article of a kind

which he dared not purchase at any place within twenty miles of Borley that day.

Having reflected long on this difficulty, which might have seemed insurmountable to ordinary men, Mr. Widgeott finally determined to meet it in a manner peculiar to himself. Having first made his bundle as compact as possible, and deposited it safely under lock and key in a closet, he returned to the cast-off wardrobe again, and selected from it a waistcoat of somewhat gaudy, but on the whole not unattractive appearance. This, made into a neat parcel, went conveniently into one of the capacious pockets of a shooting-jacket which he wore. So simple were the articles with which he provided himself for the working out of his great designs.

After breakfast he strolled carelessly into Borley village, where he perceived Isabel sitting patiently at a window, watching the street. He saw that she observed him, and looked anxiously after him as he passed the house ; but the most vigilant observer would have failed to discover in Mr. Widgeott's countenance any sign whatever of his having recognised her.

He sauntered on till he came to the door of the shop of a chemist, who combined with that business not only the profession of a dentist, but also the humbler pursuits of a dealer in iron-

mongery, garden implements, twine, and other miscellaneous articles. The shop was divided into two parts, one of which only was devoted to the sale of drugs, including horse medicines, and a slight sprinkling of scented soap, pomades, and other articles which, in more populous places, are generally to be found only in the windows of hairdressers and perfumers. Notwithstanding the wide range of this tradesman's business, it might have been remarked that his shop was exceedingly small—so small, indeed, that it would have been difficult to believe that he really dealt in so many varieties of commodities, on any other assumption than that his stock of each was extremely limited. The window-frames and lintels of the doors were paintless and dingy; the articles exposed for sale were dusty, and shrunken, and faded; and the whole place had a forlorn and neglected appearance which was not attractive. Nevertheless, the shop appeared to have a peculiar fascination in Mr. Widgeot's eyes, for he lingered about the doorway a considerable time, looked in, walked on, returned, and lingered again. Then, apparently decided at last by the appearance of the proprietor of the shop behind the counter of the drug and medicine department, he stepped in and wished him good morning.

The smallness of the shop became more striking still as Widgeott stood midway between the bottles and drawers of the chemical side, and the twine and ironmongery of the opposite division. By a stretch of his long arms he could almost have touched the two extremes, and if he had been engaged as a shopman there, might have had a good chance of being able to accomplish the interesting feat of serving both medicines and ironmongery without crossing the floor.

The proprietor of this double-sided establishment was a little bald-headed slim man, who was very busy just then in cleaning bottles on the shelves behind the counter with the end of his long apron. He returned Mr. Widgeott's salutation, and suspended operations at once, to gossip with that leisurely air which distinguishes traders in small villages.

'So you're back again, Mr. Widgeott,' remarked the chemist.

'Home yesterday, Cooper, thank ye,' replied the officer.

'Business brisk?' enquired the chemist, who would have been glad if that insidious question had led to a solution of the perplexing problem of what Mr. Widgeott's occupation really was.

‘Brisk enough,’ returned Widgeott evasively. ‘What’s become of your boy?’

‘Tom?’ enquired the chemist. ‘He’s out with prescriptions.’

‘Cooper,’ said Widgeott, as if suddenly struck with an idea, ‘isn’t that lad rather young to serve drugs?’

‘Not a bit,’ returned the other. ‘He knows every article in the shop; at least,’ he added, ‘every one within his reach.’

‘But,’ said Mr. Widgeott, ‘what about mistakes in selling poisons? There was Crampley’s man, in Chelmsford, the other day, as near killing a woman as ever chemist’s assistant was in his life.’

‘Very likely,’ returned Cooper; ‘but you see I’ve got the measure of Tom’s arms, and no stool allowed this side; why, I can’t reach them myself. Look now, for instance,’ he continued, taking his visitor’s stick from his hand in order to enable him to illustrate the argument, and tapping one of a little nest of drawers considerably above the top of his own head. ‘There’s arsenic; and there,’ he continued, tapping another, ‘is strychnine, for the vermin destroyer. If I want them, I get the steps; but Tom knows better than to meddle in the upper rows.’

‘Cooper,’ said Widgeott, as if suddenly re-

membering the real business that he had come upon, 'I've a very neat little waistcoat here.'

'Ah !' said Cooper. 'Don't want one.'

'Look at it,' urged Widgeott. 'It's your size as if your own tailor had made it. Came off a tip-top officer's back only a week ago.'

The chemist eyed it sideways as Widgeott unfolded the parcel on the counter. It was evident that the attractions of the waistcoat had moved him.

'Come now,' continued Widgeott. 'It's a mere trifle. Try it on. Show it to Mrs. Cooper. She's a woman of taste.'

'How much?' enquired the chemist.

'Try it first,' urged Widgeott. 'See if you like it. It cost me nothing. Add a little to nothing for the profit, and it's yours.'

The chemist took the article of attire, and having surveyed it again, went through a door at the back of the counter and descended to some lower depth in the establishment, there to consult Mrs. Cooper, according to the gallant suggestion of his subtle tempter.

Widgeott listened intently for his footstep as the chemist descended the stairs, looked around, and then, reaching across the counter as far as his gaunt body and long arms would admit, stealthily opened the drawer which the chemist

had pointed out as containing the deadly article employed in the manufacture of the vermin destroyer.

He found in the drawer a phial nearly filled with a white crystalline substance, cautiously labelled 'Poison. Strych. pur.' When the chemist returned to communicate to his visitor his final approval of the waistcoat, Mr. Widgeott, who, notwithstanding his exceptional size, was remarkably nimble-fingered, had succeeded in transferring a small portion of this white substance to a paper; this paper he folded with great precision, and put away in his pocket, having first carefully closed the bottle and shut the drawer in which he had deposited it again. The operation was performed so quickly that he had abundant time before the chemist's return to assume once more that easy air of patient expectation in which his friend had left him.

The bargain for the waistcoat being concluded, and the amount set against a small counter-claim for ironmongery on the side of the chemist, Widgeott took his leave and walked down the street to his cottage, where he remained engaged for the remainder of the day in the innocent occupations of repairing the porch and railings of his home, and writing upon paper, in a hand

that resembled capital print letters. It was not until some hours after sunset that he slunk away from the place, carrying a bundle under his arm, and took a bypath across fields and plantations towards the barrack.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GUARD-WARD.

SINCE the day of Carrell's arrival at Borley in the farm-cart, he had been kept a close prisoner in the guard-ward of the barrack hospital, a square chamber on the ground-floor, devoted to the custody of patients who were at the same time offenders against the laws of military discipline.

It was a dismal place, into which the rays of the sun rarely found their way. The door was kept constantly locked, and the room was illuminated at night only by a lamp which shone through a barred fanlight from a point on the opposite wall of the passage outside. A truckle bed, a straw chair, and a rude wooden table were its only furniture. The walls were whitewashed and bare. On one side was a fireplace, where on cold nights the doctor ordered a fire to be lighted, which was stirred and provided with fuel by a hospital orderly, who entered on all occasions under the guard of the sentry. On the other side there was a window, in so

deep an embrasure of the wall that it was only by climbing into it that a man could see into the ground at the back of the hospital, through the solid iron bars which were set into the brick-work outside. It was not without good reason that Jackson had boasted of the strength and security of this chamber ; for even if a prisoner had possessed a file it would have been difficult for him to use it against the bars ; the window, as Jackson had remarked, being so constructed that it could only be opened to admit air for about a foot distance above or below. No strength of human arm could have sufficed to have broken the clasps which held the strong-bound iron frames, and every kind of weapon suitable for such a purpose was kept from the reach of its inmate.

In this dismal place Carrell passed the weary days of his captivity, while yet it was doubtful whether life could outlast the tortures of that journey. His cheerless prison was not favourable for the recovery of a patient, but his strong constitution prevailed. After awhile he improved, his wounds gradually healed, and slowly his strength returned. But a great change had come over him. He had become moody and sullen. He spoke to no one—not even to the doctor or the hospital sergeant,

though they treated him kindly. The doctor reported that his solitary imprisonment was likely to injure his reason, but no attention was paid to his humane suggestion. All day long, and sometimes far into the night, the sentry in the corridor heard his prisoner pace restlessly to and fro on the floor of his narrow chamber like a wild beast in a cage. Men who had had experience of the habits of prisoners prophesied that evil would come of all this. 'The man is brooding trouble,' said the hospital orderly; but affairs at Borley generally took their course, and few persons heeded such prophecies there.

It would have grieved Isabel's heart to have known the extent of that change. The news which Surgeon Spilsby had announced to him of her intended marriage with the colonel, had turned his whole nature to gall. He pictured her to himself happy, in the enjoyment of wealth and power; too happy, indeed, to be disturbed by the thought of his miseries. She would now, he reflected, be surrounded by his enemies, would hear him described as a scoundrel of the lowest class, would listen even to the tyrant Jackson's calumnies without a doubt of their truth.

The mind of a sick man is prone to exaggerate evils, and to take unjust views of his relations

with the world outside his chamber. When that chamber is also a prison, the effect is not improved. By degrees he transferred these feelings to Isabel herself. He had a secret consciousness that it was her connection with the colonel, and the circumstance of her visit to the barrack, which had led to his arrest. He imagined her talking lightly of their adventures, until her description of him had awakened curiosity, and so had reached the ears of Jackson, or the man Widgett, ever ready to follow any scent that might be given him for the discovery of a fugitive from Borley. If so, it was natural enough that she should feel ashamed of their acquaintance, and should trouble herself no more with the question of his fate. Even her cheerfulness, turning so soon to dignity and coldness, when he seemed for a moment to have presumed upon it, now weighed against her in the balance of his mind. Thus the wild love that he had encouraged had changed to a feeling almost of horror; so easily do strong passions fall into opposite extremes. All that was gentle in his nature was gradually effaced. He felt as if he stood alone, at war with a world that was at war with him. He grew passionate, irritable, revengeful: the prediction of the hospital orderly was, indeed, not far from the truth.

There was a period in the early days of his captivity when, feverish, spiritless, and low, his thoughts had turned night and day on the one idea of death. For in the darkest hour of his misery the determination never to undergo the hateful punishment hanging over him was still strong within him. The suicide of a prisoner was too obvious a contingency not to have been foreseen by the hospital authorities; and everything by which a man would be likely to endeavour to inflict injury on himself had been carefully removed from his cell. And yet he thought, in his bitterest moods, how easy to baffle them—to beat out his brains against the whitened brick wall, or to strangle himself with the miserable coverings which were provided for his bed. He knew none living, unless it were the Stedmans, to whom such an end of his miseries would bring regret; and the evil spirit engendered by the persecution he had suffered, and his dismal imprisonment, had obliterated all sense of higher obligations. Thus one night, after the orderly had left him for the last time, he rose from his seat, set his teeth firmly, and prepared for the end.

But the noise of some one returning interrupted him. There were voices in the corridor without. The sentry dropped his carbine with

a sharp ring upon the pavement ; the great lock turned, and Jackson entered under guard of the soldier.

He had come partly to determine, by the evidence of his eyesight, how far the prisoner had progressed towards recovery, and partly to enjoy the spectacle of this humiliation of his old rival.

‘ They report you sulky,’ said Jackson. ‘ What’s your grievance ?’

Carrell made no answer ; but standing erect, surveyed his questioner with a gaze so wild and strange, that even the brutal sergeant quailed ; for the light that came through the high grated fanlight over the door shone full upon the prisoner’s features.

Jackson muttered something about a mode he knew of helping silent prisoners to find a voice ; but in truth he was ill at ease.

As he walked round the room closely attended by the soldier, Carrell followed him with his eyes in a way that was ominous. ‘ He means mischief,’ said the sentry as they passed into the corridor again. ‘ Anybody can see that. Take heed, sir.’

‘ The man looks mad,’ said Jackson, who felt a relief in getting out of his cell. ‘ The surgeon was right, but that is no reason for setting

him at liberty,' and he chuckled at his own shrewdness in detecting this weak point in the surgeon's reasoning.

It was well for the redoubtable Jackson that Carrell was no longer in possession of that weapon with which he had threatened Widgeott in the marsh. As it was, that single visit had turned the whole current of his prisoner's thoughts. He meditated no longer upon death. A thirst for revenge upon his hateful persecutor took possession of his soul, and sustained him like a new hope. For awhile he ceased to pace to and fro between the walls of his prison. He found a horrible delight in sitting upon the edge of his low bed, with his chin resting on his hands, while he brooded hour by hour on the question of how to destroy the man who had tortured him so long. He rejoiced, like Samson, in the consciousness of that returning vigour, which was the sole resource left him for wreaking vengeance upon his enemy. Day by day he tested himself by lifting the rude wooden table, and holding it at arms' length while he counted the seconds to determine how long he could endure that tax upon his powers. The very exercise helped him to recover the strength in which he had once prided himself; and he watched its development with the greediness of one who

hoards up a treasure for some future purpose upon which life and reputation are at stake. For he knew well that if his old powers were restored, Jackson would be no match for him.

Carrell brooded over this idea through all his waking hours. The coarse food that he ate became more welcome to him from the thought that it helped him to sustain that strength which he coveted so much. Whether Jackson would visit him again in his cell, he knew not ; but either at his trial, or somewhere else, he felt little doubt of being able to encounter him once more. He reflected with bitterness upon the opportunity that he had lost when the sergeant had entered his prison. How easy, it seemed to him, would it have been to have rushed upon him, and before the sentry could have stepped back to present his weapon, to have dashed him against the wall with a violence which would have destroyed him ; or to have seized the sentry's carbine, and brained him before the man could have recovered his surprise. But this would have been impossible without that strength which he longed to regain. And so he nursed himself, lifted his window rails as far as the clasps would permit for a fresher air—took to pacing to and fro again for bodily exercise, and even courted sleep with no object but

to recruit his powers in order to prepare himself for this terrible purpose.

It was a kind of madness ; but the thoughts and feelings of that time settled deeply. They had gone far to convert him into that desperate ruffian which Jackson had depicted him ; they had obliterated from his mind even the sentiment of gratitude for kindnesses he had received—some from mere strangers like the Stedmans, others from comrades, who, in spite of the claims of duty, had done their best to alleviate his sufferings. Men have been changed like this, who have never risen again from the depth of their degradation, or regained a resemblance to their former selves. And this, indeed, promised to be Carrell's fate.

Many days passed in this way, but he waited patiently. There was a present enjoyment in the contemplation of his vengeance in all its horrible details, upon which he dwelt with a delight which was scarcely human. Meanwhile, his strength increased daily : the ill-fitting garments of blue serge which were provided by the hospital regulations, hung no longer in such loose folds upon his shrunken form. Every time the orderly visited him to bring him food or medicines, each moment when the sentry without paused in his monotonous walk, he

listened eagerly in the hope that his enemy was at hand ; but he did not come.

To those who saw him in his prison now he seemed to have become more resigned. The orderly noted that he slept better, ate his food more regularly, and ceased to walk at night in the old restless way ; but the surgeon noted a certain wildness in his eyes which confirmed his suspicions. Carrell's returning strength, however, had precipitated the time fixed for a court-martial upon him, and it was decided that there was no necessity for making any change in the system of his imprisonment.

One night, as Carrell was occupied as usual with these ideas, he had been startled by hearing the low, monotonous growl of a dog in the ground beneath his window. The slightest break in the dull routine of his prison life was sufficient to arouse his attention ; and he climbed into the embrasure, and looking through the bars, stared into the darkness without. By degrees his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and he could easily distinguish the shape of the animal as he made ineffectual attempts to spring up the wall from the depth of the trench which bordered it. . Led by the direction of the dog's efforts, he could now plainly perceive some

dusky figure upon the wall. The dog growled again and sprang upward, as if infuriated by his inability to reach the object which had disturbed him. Then Carrell remarked that the figure disappeared and the dog retired with a surly whine.

He knew well that the bloodhound was kept loose in the hospital court at night, where no one could enter after dark on legitimate business; but the incident passed from his mind as of little importance. The figure on the wall seemed to him probably that of some person who had strayed there, actuated only by motives of curiosity. Anyway, the stranger had disappeared after making the discovery that the place was well guarded.

At a later hour on the following night his attention was arrested by something far more extraordinary. This was a low grating sound close to the outside of the window of his prison.

He listened for a few moments, and could distinctly hear the noise again. It was now like some one scratching at a hard substance. It bore no resemblance to the noise made by a file, but it continued with a steadiness and perseverance not unlike that of some one endeavouring to wear away the bars with such a tool. Yet it was certain that his mysterious visitor was engaged in no operation of that kind, for in the

pale light that shone across the cell from the grating above, he could distinctly see the bottom of these bars, where no hand was visible. His window was opened as far as he was able to raise it, but it was not possible to see the ground immediately beneath it at the angle at which he stood. Once, however, he thought that he caught a glimpse of a dark shape, like the top of a man's cap, close to the cell, but it vanished again, and the low noise continued as before.

He knew that workmen had been recently engaged on that side of the building, and the thought crossed his mind that perhaps some one was engaged under orders to strengthen the bars of his prison ; this would account for the silence of the dog ; but the stealth and secrecy with which the work, whatever it might be, seemed to be progressing, and above all, the lateness of the hour, for it was long since the evening bugle had sounded, convinced him that this was not the solution of the mystery.

Looking through again after awhile, he was astonished to see that one of the bars was already lifted out of its usual position, as if the brick-work which had held it fast had been loosened by a lever. A moment later some hand had restored it to its position again.

In a little while, a second bar was loosened

in this way. He now became convinced that an attempt was being made to facilitate his escape. The regular tread of the sentry was still audible in the stone corridor without. It was doubtful if he could have heard anything if he had paused to listen; but as long as he paced to and fro, Carrell knew that the noise could not attract his attention. He climbed into the embrasure, and putting his mouth to the opening between the bottom of the frame and the sill, he whispered—

‘It is useless; the window will not rise high enough for a man to pass.’

The whisper was loud enough to be heard by anyone at work so near to where he uttered these words; but the mysterious stranger paid no heed to it. He continued his work with indefatigable industry, until the prisoner saw a third bar loosened. Then the end of a long steel instrument was passed through the aperture. Carrell seized it; but still he saw no one, —heard no voice. He took the instrument and placed it immediately under the cover of the clothes upon his bed, and returning to the window, found for the first time a rough hand through the bars. It held a slip of paper, which he took. The hand then shook his own with a cordial grip, and disappeared.

Carrell took it for the hand of Stedman. 'Who else,' he thought, 'would risk life for me?'

At first the idea had seized him that perhaps this was some trap of his enemy's to destroy him—some plan for furnishing a sentry with an excuse for firing upon him in the darkness, and so ridding the barrack of a troublesome inmate. But the chance of regaining liberty was too precious to be neglected; and what was life to him unless he could be free? He unfolded the paper, which contained a few lines of writing in imitation of capital print letters, and without signature. By the uncertain light of the lamp without, he was enabled to read the words.

OPEN THE WINDOW YOURSELF. CLOTHING AND MONEY JUST BENEATH IT. THE DOG QUIETED. A PLANK AGAINST THE WALL. GO THROUGH THE RING OF FIRS; THEN THE CORSE. HIGH ROAD TO BORLEY, AND AWAY. TAKE THIS NOTE WITH YOU.

The sentry was still pacing to and fro in the passage outside the door of his cell. Carrell hesitated no longer, but took the steel bar, and climbing into the embrasure, applied it to the clasp of the window. The strength of the clasp was considerable, but it yielded gradually to the steady leverage applied by a muscular arm. It made a slight report as the iron gave way. He

listened, but the sentry was pacing still. The other clasp yielded in like manner, and he was enabled to raise the window high over his head.

He knew that he was safe for awhile, for the sentry rarely entered the guard-ward at night. As he penetrated the embrasure the loosened bars yielded easily : he laid them gently aside, and stepping out, and clinging to the sill for awhile, dropped easily to the ground.

A wild sense of liberty thrilled him as he touched the earth once more. His old daring returned. He grasped the steel implement which had served him so well, and, hurried as he was, placed it carefully on the ledge where he could find it again. Stooping down, he found the bundle of clothes which his unknown deliverer had indicated. In a few moments he had divested himself of the hospital clothing, which would inevitably have led to his being arrested again if he had worn it, and had hastily attired himself in the garments provided for him, having made those he had worn into a bundle, which he carried with him.

Only a few moments were consumed in finding the plank placed across the fosse to the top of the wall. This he ascended nimbly, and dropped on to the other side. He passed through the ring of firs and the copse, and along

the high road, as the note had directed, till he found a plantation, which he entered for a moment. Here he concealed his bundle among the withered fern and brambles, for he knew that his pursuers would assume, from the disappearance of the hospital clothing, that he still wore it, and would thus involuntarily mislead those who might arrest him.

Carrell passed that night through Borley village, where Isabel Frere, sleepless and weary, still watched at her window for some sign of Widdett. She might even have seen a dusk figure, a little after midnight, stealing along under the walls of the houses, and failed to trace in it the man for whom she had sacrificed so much. For he passed away into the darkness, knowing nothing of her presence in that spot, but full of bitterness towards her.

The early dew was on the grass when Isabel left the house that morning to keep her appointment with Widdett by the barred gate. Few persons were astir at that hour in the village as she passed through it with an anxious heart. She had received no intelligence from him since he had so unexpectedly declared himself her friend, but had waited patiently, and had implicitly obeyed the injunction that he had given

her to remain concealed. Her spirit sank as she came up to the gate and found no one there, but a moment had scarcely elapsed before a head appeared through a gap in the wood beside the field. It was the head of that scheming officer.

‘All’s well, madam,’ he said. ‘The cage is broken, and the bird is in the air.’

‘Are you sure?’ she faltered.

‘As sure as eyes could make me,’ replied Widgett. ‘I saw him pass this way, but gave him no token. The less hands in a plot the better. With clothes and money provided for him, he’s far enough away by this hour, and ten to one nobody has missed him yet.’

Isabel was too much agitated to enquire further. Carrell’s safety had been the sole object of her thoughts. That secured, it had seemed to her easy to bear patiently the reproaches and the calumnies which the world might heap upon her—to return and lead the old life of solitude, and to strive in some good work to forget the past. She asked her companion, therefore, no other question, but drawing from her pocket the purse and the trinkets which she had promised him, placed them in his hands.

‘It is enough,’ she said; ‘take these. I am sure you have not deceived me. They had

been yours from the first if you had not refused them.'

'You are too generous, madam,' said Widdett, as he opened the purse, and taking out some of the coins, dropped them in her hand. 'You'll want money,' he continued. 'It will be well for you to disappear from this neighbourhood as swiftly and as quietly as you can.'

Mr. Widdett paused. He had bethought himself that perhaps it would be wise, even thus early, to bespeak that patronage from the colonel's affianced bride which might prove so valuable in the future.

'There is but one thing,' he added, 'which I would venture to ask of you. I have run some risk, as you may suppose, for the sake of this business——'

He hesitated in a manner that was unusual with him; and Isabel spoke—

'I am more grateful, indeed,' she said, 'than money or these trifles can express. But I am afraid I have no power to serve you further.'

'I mean,' said Mr. Widdett, regaining his self-command, 'when you return to Borley.' And his countenance wore that cunning expression which men assume who wish it to be understood that they are in possession of a secret.

'I can never return,' replied Isabel calmly.

Mr. Widgeott was troubled. 'I beg pardon, madam,' he said, 'but I took the liberty of alluding to the report of your approaching marriage with Colonel Carew.'

'It is false,' she said, with an emphasis which might have repulsed a less enterprising person; but he was now too curious to desist from pressing the point.

'Forgive me,' he urged. 'It is talked of at the barracks. The colonel himself speaks of it.'

'It is false,' she repeated, with a dignity very different from that tone of humility and dejection in which she had addressed him until then. 'Colonel Carew knows well that there can be no such marriage.'

She bade him good-day coldly, and went her way by the road towards the village again. Mr. Widgeott's eyes were opened wide, and his whole countenance was expressive of astonishment, as he gazed after her for awhile. Then his features relaxed into a grave and sombre cast. He drew a long breath and whistled, which seemed to bring him some relief.

'No marriage! and the colonel knows it,' he muttered. 'Then this fellow is no brother; but a lover of the girl's, and I've been dreaming all this while.'

Mr. Widgeott felt humbled ; but recovered his spirits after a while.

‘ I should like to know the man,’ he thought, ‘ who would have guessed all that.’

Soothed by this balm for his wounded pride, and consoled by the reflection that he had not laboured solely for prospective advantages, and that the escape of Carrell would certainly redound to his credit, he having been the first to warn Jackson on the subject, Mr. Widgeott walked leisurely on towards the barracks again.

Meanwhile, Carrell pursued his way towards London, taking the high road, as Widgeott’s paper had advised.

He had left all his old life behind him, and with it all the hopes and passions that were part of it, to go forth and battle with the world in a new sphere, where his enemies would not think to seek for him. The change that had been wrought within him was great indeed.

His heart was scarcely softened by this service performed for him at so much risk by an unknown hand. If he thought of it, it was only to dismiss it as a thing to be repaid in some way if he prospered, and if not, to be forgotten.

It would have fared ill with any man who had sought to detain him that night, as he pulled

his cap low, and grasping still the short steel bar which he carried with him in a side pocket, went on till daylight at a pace which left Borley far enough behind to make it safe to rest and refresh himself awhile ; but he did not linger long. He avoided the railway, where he knew that the telegraph might out-distance him. A carrier's cart going to London overtook him near Ingatestone, and the man gave him a ride for a small fee. Before noon he had mingled with that great stream of life in which the persecuted and the fugitive have so often found peace.

CHAPTER X.

THE LADY IN BLACK.

THE escape of Carrell from the guard-ward of the hospital at Borley was long remembered by the inhabitants of the barracks. It raised the name of that notorious deserter at once to the level of that of any of the famous prison-breakers of bygone times. He seemed, indeed, in the eyes of his comrades, to be endowed with powers which must always prove more than a match for the devices of those who would seize or confine him, and the military authorities were scarcely less puzzled at the impunity with which he had defied them so long. Meanwhile, no suspicion lighted upon Widgett. Sergeant-Major Jackson himself would have been as likely an object of suspicion as that astute officer.

Though the affair was not forgotten, men began by degrees to talk less about it. Other topics of interest arose, and as no trace was found of the whereabouts of the prisoner, these eclipsed for awhile the marvellous story

of the escape from the hospital guard-ward. Mr. Widgeott went to and fro, holding mysterious conferences with the authorities, and absenting himself again and again in company with the devoted Goldney, for the purpose of following up certain clues which he was believed to have discovered ; but it was of no avail. Days, weeks, months went by. The bills offering a reward for the detection of the notorious deserter, rotted by the rain and torn by the winds, dropped away from the walls and notice-boards of watchhouses to which they had been affixed, and still there came no tidings of Carrell, except occasional rumours which on enquiry proved to be false. Old hands, who knew the difficulties in the way of a deserter concealing himself permanently, gave it as their opinion that the man was dead. They suggested that he had probably resorted again to his old device of swimming, and had so perished, and this was a notion which Widgeott himself had no objection to encourage.

Owing to Isabel's refusal to give her name to the orderly at the colonel's quarters, it happened that no one at Borley was aware of her visit except Widgeott and the Honourable Mrs. Carew, who for obvious reasons were silent on that

subject. When Isabel returned to her home on the day of her parting with Widgeott, her father had sent for her, and had demanded an account of her absence; and Isabel had answered frankly that she had been to Borley.

‘For what purpose?’ asked the father, and he fixed upon her a look which might have disconcerted one more accustomed to dissemble; but Isabel answered calmly—

‘I went to repair a great error that I had committed.’

‘I have no skill in riddles,’ said Frere angrily. ‘What error could have required you to fly from your home in the night, and return to the barracks?’

There was a dignity and a composure in her manner which struck her father strangely. She did not crouch before him now, or supplicate for favour. The crisis was past, the object of her sufferings had been accomplished, and she was at peace with herself, and prepared to bear the weight of his displeasure.

‘I will tell you,’ she answered, ‘as far as I am able without injuring others. I was the unhappy cause of the discovery of his retreat; it was my act which led to his being shot down and subjected to a cruel torture. Without my aid I knew that he would die. This was

why I went to Borley. I did not leave there until I had learnt that he was free.'

Frere received this intelligence with astonishment; but he was too curious about her relations with Carrell to care much about the details of his escape.

'Have you seen this man?' he asked.

'No.'

'Do you know where he is?'

'I know nothing, but that he is free.'

'Will he seek you, or endeavour to renew this miserable acquaintance?'

'I think not. He does not know that I was instrumental in setting him at liberty. He can have no reason for seeking me. I have expiated the wrong that I did him, that is all. I loved him, it is true; but I have confessed it to you only. He knows not—never can know of my weakness. I ask nothing now but to be allowed to forget him.'

Frere knew his daughter too well to have doubts of the sincerity of her words. He was soothed, and his tone was less angry when he spoke again.

'Promise me,' he said, 'that you will not maintain any relations with this man.'

'I give my word,' she replied.

'I am satisfied,' said the father. 'Now get

to your rooms, and give me time to forgive you.'

She went away from his presence feeling a strange calm. Her life was thenceforth changed. She knew well that Carrell's miserable lot must be a bar between them for ever, and she rejoiced in the thought that he could have no suspicion of that romantic passion which she had cherished for him. 'He will forget me,' she thought, 'and it is well.' She reflected that while he carried about with him this terrible secret, her love could only have rendered his fate more bitter; that she would have been a clog upon his energies—an additional source of distress and misery to him, making his dread of discovery greater—his anguish, if imprisoned once more, still harder to bear.

She became resigned to her solitary life again. When she thought of the man whose fate had been so mysteriously interwoven with her own, it was always with a generous faith in his goodness, which nothing that she had heard could shake. She delighted at times to weave together a romance that might be the story of his life; but always with a tenderness for his faults which brought relief to her mind. The few scraps of his history which she had learnt from himself

and from Stedman were precious to her now. The young and the enthusiastic sometimes indulge in dreams like these only to awaken to a bitter reality; but her fancies could bring no disappointment, and love—say what men will—is often a surer light than mere worldly wisdom. It is certain that Isabel divined Carrell's history with a truer instinct than that of those harsher judges by whom he had been surrounded. The brightest of her dreams was nearer to the true story of his life than the calumnies of his enemies. Carrell had enlisted, as he had said, when a mere lad, and from no worse motive than a youthful hatred of dependence. The step once taken, he had accepted his position frankly. He had resolved to conceal his history until such time as he could avow it without causing pain to the few relatives he had still living. Promotion in the army is hard to achieve by one who begins from so lowly a position; but it is not a thing wholly unknown, and the young soldier's sanguine temper had led him to regard it as almost certain; under happier circumstances, indeed, it is probable that his superior education, his talents, and his remarkable physical powers, would eventually have raised him far above the position of a mere private of dragoons. Jackson had per-

ceived this, and hence that implacable hatred which had resulted in Carrell's ruin. Such was the simple history of the deserter's career. Isabel's day-dreams differed little from the truth.

It was a delight to her now to think that the miseries she had endured on his account would probably never be known to him. The sacrifice seemed to her purer for the fact that it was secret, and that it made no claim even upon his gratitude. As for the love that she had encouraged, she regarded it now with no shame; with no regret even, save for the horrors which it had brought upon him. Her impulsive character had known little restraint from a mother's care. Her solitary life had left her too unworldly even to understand the caution which would forbid a passion so sudden in its growth. The romantic adventures through which they had passed together, the fact that he had become associated with that liberty and enjoyment of the free air and sunshine which the rigid system of her home life rendered so rare, and, above all, the humiliation which she had been compelled to endure at Borley, had all served to draw her closer to him. Clothed with her own innocence, she had seemed safe from every harm; and she looked back now upon these things with no consciousness of peril escaped,

or of disgrace averted. So far did her faith sustain her.

She obtained no tidings of Carrell, and sought for none. If he had been re-captured the Stedmans would have informed her; and she rejoiced in the fact that no rumours reached her now to disturb the pure current of her thoughts. Her father's estrangement had become greater than ever, but Frere was not accustomed to allow his mind to be disturbed by domestic matters. He was vexed at the defeat of his schemes, angry at the self-will which had displayed itself again in her flight from her home, and in that strange self-possession with which she had met him on her return; but he indulged in no reproaches. He was too prudent, and withal too proud a man, to make a confidant of anyone of what he regarded as his daughter's folly. Satisfied with her assurances, he forbore to enquire into the circumstances of Carrell's disappearance; and he saw that his best course was to keep secret the story of her visit to Borley. 'If she aided in the escape,' he reflected, 'it was probably by means of a bribe to some dependent, about which it will not serve my interest to make a stir.' So Frere banished the matter from his mind. He devoted himself by day to that business which

occupied so much of his personal care, and in the evening he dined, as was his custom, in a solitary box in the coffee-room of a City tavern. Thus it came to pass that Isabel's life was even more retired than it had been before, until an accident suggested to her a new direction for the employment of her energies.

Sitting at her window one night, she observed again the feeble light burning late in a garret window which had attracted her attention on the night of her flight. She knew by the regularity of its appearance there that the garret contained some sick inmate. The thought of the many weary hours of watching that must have been consumed by some one by that miserable bedside, disturbed her like a reproach. The next day the blind of the garret window was raised a little to admit the pale rays of the winter's sun, and she could see into the room. The walls were bare; a table and two chairs seemed its only furniture, with the exception of a low bed against the wall, on which a woman was lying.

'This is the poor sick person,' thought Isabel. 'I will go there and offer my help.'

It was no momentary impulse, but the beginning of a craving for a useful life, which

brought her its reward. The occupants of the garret were a poor widow and a daughter. The latter was afflicted with an incurable disease. The mother lived upon a trifling pension, eked out by needlework, for which her eyesight was becoming more and more unfitted. They were honest people, and did not abuse her kindness. Isabel took her share in the duty of watching the sick girl night by night until she died.

After that she looked about for new objects of compassion. In that quarter of the town they are not hard to find. By degrees she became known to the poor people of the neighbourhood, and to those who went among them doing good like herself in their way. But she joined no society of ministrants to the sick ; she adopted no peculiar costume, beyond the simple black attire which attracted no attention from the idle, and among the better sort commanded respect. She asked no one for alms on their account, but did not blame those who did. She was too timid and retiring to solicit favour even for that good work ; and it seemed to her that it was best that she should labour only in the way she had chosen. 'I am poor,' she would say, 'just as they are ; but there are a hundred modes of serving and comforting them

which are within my power.' She did not presume to administer religious consolation to any—there were others, she reflected, better fitted than she, ever ready for that pious duty. Her task was to lighten their load, as far as she was able, by labour and patience, and a kindly spirit. For her work was not confined to mere attentions to sick people. For some she wrote letters to sons at sea, or to daughters in employments far away; for others she tended little children while the mother was compelled to leave them to go upon some duty. Often enough she took her place beside a poor seamstress, and helped her to complete a hurried labour on which her bread depended. Nor did she choose carefully between one task and another, or weigh nicely the claims of each. She followed no more recondite system than that of taking up the work which lay in her daily path, satisfied if it gained her a blessing from those whose good word few considered.

Perhaps it was well for her that she had no wealth to distribute among the objects of her kindness. She was spared the disappointments which spring up in the way of ordinary benevolence. The hypocrisy, and the cunning, and the meanness which are often engendered by almsgiving did not come to distress her with

doubts of whether the good or the evil preponderated among the fruits of her labours. Only kind and honest faces seemed to meet her in her ministrations among the poor. For she knew well that those she helped really needed help. Few were ungrateful to her, and many showed a self-denial and a fear of taxing her generosity too far, which touched her more than thanks.

‘You owe me no debt,’ she would answer to their protestations. ‘I led an idle, selfish life, and was wretched ; now I have found employment the days pass quickly, and I am happier than I can express.’

Sometimes she passed through that neighbourhood in which she had endured so many terrors on the night of her flight. The tokens of misery and of vice which met her eyes there shocked and distressed her ; but the Lady in Black, as she was called among the people, passed always unmolested. There were rough natures there, incapable, as might have been supposed, of any generous act, who would have come at once to the defence of one whom so many blessed. Such things are not unknown among those who give up ease and pleasure to walk in these thorny paths. There was no hatching, little curtseying, as she passed. Most

were too coarse and ignorant to practise even such humble expressions of civility as these. But groups at street corners and around doorways, as they parted to make way for her, received her with respectful silence, and sometimes with a strange, abashed look, as if her goodness had touched them for a moment with an unwonted sense of their degraded lives.

Thus Isabel Frere spent that long winter. Spring and summer came again, and found her still not wearied of that good work.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. SAMUEL GRINDLEY.

READERS who have bestowed attention on the progress of this story will not have forgotten, among the numerous differences and shades of distinction between Cousins of May Fair and Frere of Wellclose Square, the important fact that Frere was a lawyer, while Cousins was not. Frere had been duly articulated and admitted to the practice of that profession on which the business of lending money engrafts itself so conveniently ; he reaped, in consequence, the profits both of the lawyer and the capitalist. Cousins, on the other hand, having begun life as a tailor, and only drifted into the money-lending business by slow degrees, was deprived of this advantage. He had, indeed, some knowledge of law, picked up in the course of a considerable experience of legal proceedings ; but such knowledge, as everyone knows, does not qualify a man for practising the profession of an attorney. For that purpose the Legislature has prescribed certain forms to be gone

through. There must be articles duly stamped; a long course of study, examinations, certificates, and what not. Cousins had arrived at a period of life when such things were no longer possible. He had found it expedient to abandon tailoring, but he was not prepared to expend five years in dreary servitude to a legal practitioner, not to speak of other troublesome forms and ceremonies, for the mere sake of enabling him to send in bills of costs to those who were obliging enough to borrow his money. Yet the law threatened penalties against any who should practise as an attorney without those preliminaries. The difficulty was serious, but it was not insurmountable. Cousins got over it by evading the law in a simple but effectual manner.

In the course of his dealings with borrowers, he had fallen in with a little old man named Grindley, who numbered among the few qualifications which he possessed for being serviceable to his fellow-man, that of being a legally qualified practitioner in the courts of law. The name of Samuel Grindley may be found in the law lists by anyone who will look back some half century or more. It will be seen from the evidence of those records that he had then many signs about him of being a prosperous gentle-

man, as indeed he was. He was clerk to a great City company, parish lawyer, a commissioner of taxes. He held various other posts of honour and profit in the City of London, in which he flourished. His name was respected far beyond the limits of his profession; his business was extensive and lucrative. It would have seemed a safe prophecy in those days to have said that Grindley, if he lived to be an old man, would die rich; yet in a very few years later he had found himself miserably poor.

The explanation of his rapid decline was to be found in those convivial habits which Mr. Grindley, to his own sorrow and shame, had acquired at a very early period of his life. For first he fell into disgrace with clients, who objected to have wills drawn by a legal adviser whose ideas became incoherent and whose utterance grew thick at an early hour in the day. When business thus dropped away, Mr. Grindley dropped away too, and left the course of affairs to subordinates, who did not feel bound to show more zeal in the management of their employer's business than that gentleman did himself. So by degrees he lost both his appointments and his business. He became embarrassed: misfortunes thickened. His wife died, and he drank deeper. He had the mean-

ness sometimes to post-date the period of his declension from sober habits, and to declare that grief for the loss of an amiable partner had been the cause of his ruin. But this was only in his cups. When sobriety was returning, and with it the remorse that generally succeeds to fits of drinking, he did not scruple to reproach himself, even in public, with having been the cause of the misery that had sent a young wife to her grave. At such times he would cry like a child. His tears were sincere ; but it must be admitted that Mr. Grindley's fits of weeping were very frequent, and could not always be traced to any rational cause.

In this way the unhappy Grindley sank lower and lower. His great offices were given up for smaller ones, which were relinquished in their turn for smaller still. At length he came to rent nothing but two rooms over an oilman's shop in Sherborne Lane, City ; the door of one of which apartments was marked 'Mr. Samuel Grindley. Office ;' while the other, in which he slept, ate, and drank, bore the word 'Private,' to warn off inconvenient intrusion. He practised at this time in the inferior courts, and sometimes appeared before magistrates to defend a prisoner, and at other times failed to appear, to the vexation of the unhappy client

who had entrusted him with his case and a guinea in advance. There was a general belief in his new walk of life that he was a man of ability, and that if he chose to be sober he might yet retrieve his fortunes. All this was a delusion. Grindley never had much brains. But the delusion was useful to him; for it caused men to be patient with his failings. There is a love of paradox in the class among which Grindley now earned his living which is favourable to the maintenance of notions of this kind. No one, looking at poor Grindley's countenance, could have honestly declared that he discerned any remarkable sign of intelligence in it; but it was a habit with people when they mentioned him to say, 'Clever man. What a pity he drinks. Might have done so well.'

He was at this time a poor, shabby-looking, little old man, whom, apart from his unbusiness-like habits, no attorney would have taken for a clerk. His hand had a habit of trembling in the morning which was not indicative of a sober life; nor was his nose more likely to inspire confidence in an employer. There was a time when that feature had glowed in the midst of his lined and wrinkled face as with an inward fire; but the fire had departed—burnt out, as it were, though certainly not for want of the

old fuel that had fed it. Its glow had been succeeded by a pallor like that of ash among wood embers, varied only by a few streaks of vinous purple; due, perhaps, less to the old cause than to irritation produced by the snuff of which Mr. Grindley consumed every day no inconsiderable quantity. His hair was of that iron-grey which seems never to fall off and leave the head bald. He wore at all times, spread out over his breast, a white cravat, or one that would have been white had his laundress lived in a purer atmosphere than that of Sherborne Lane. In other respects, shoes tied with bows of black ribbon, rusty black trousers hanging loose upon his shrunken limbs, and a waistcoat and dress-coat of the same rusty material, were his invariable attire.

It has been remarked by political philosophers that there is a natural gravitation in men towards the positions in life for which they are most fitted. The great law of supply and demand operates in the labour market as in the marts in which commodities are bought and sold, distributing the stock of humanity, and assigning each to his fitting place. It was, perhaps, in obedience to some such influence as this that Mr. Grindley found himself moved one

morning to pay a visit to Cousins of May Fair. The unhappy lawyer was penniless : in that condition he was always remorseful ; but at this time a peculiar trouble weighed upon him. Amid all his misfortunes he had hitherto never failed to find by some means the sum of twelve pounds per annum, which had been fixed by law as the price at which a duly-admitted attorney should be permitted to practise ; for without this he must have been deprived of his 'certificate,' as it is called, and must have retired from the only pursuit by which he could hope to obtain bread. But the time had come at last when to find this sum was as hard a task for poor Grindley as to discharge the National Debt. He had not got it. No one would lend it him. The workhouse stared him in the face.

Grindley knew something of Cousins through old clients, and Cousins knew Grindley's name at least, though he had lost sight of him for some years. The unhappy lawyer had somewhere heard that Cousins was a man who lent money without any very tangible security, and he had a notion that a statement of his necessity might move him to suggest some lien on his future earnings, by which that trifling sum might be made secure.

Cousins heard the little old man's story, in

the inner recesses of his office in May Fair, surveyed him carefully from head to foot, read his history in his features and general appearance, and determined at once to lend the money; or rather, since money deposited in the hands of men of Grindley's stamp is apt to be diverted from the uses originally intended, he resolved to send a messenger, with a cheque for twelve pounds, to take out a certificate qualifying Samuel Grindley, gentleman, to continue to practise as an attorney-at-law and a solicitor of the High Court of Chancery.

Cousins' house was let in chambers, of which that celebrated bill-discounter occupied all those upon the ground-floor. A passage leading to a wide, antique staircase divided these apartments in twain. People who called on Cousins about a week after this event found the door on the left of this passage provided with a brass knocker, and inscribed with the words 'Mr. Samuel Grindley, solicitor;' while the door directly facing it on the right-hand side still presented, as it had always done, the inscription 'Mr. Cousins. Office.' Grindley now occupied what had been Cousins' private apartment, in lieu of which the ex-tailor had hired other rooms upon an upper floor. In fact, the little old man had entered into Cousins' employment,

to serve him in all lawful things and at all reasonable hours to the best of his ability. Such was the secret compact; but to strangers who observed the change, Cousins remarked—

‘I have let the place to a lawyer: a queer old fellow; but knows his work. He will do business for me. Convenient, you know, to have your lawyer close at hand.’

There were but few men beside Cousins, perhaps, who would have been willing to try the experiment of converting a ruined attorney and a confirmed drunkard into a useful man of business. But Cousins was accustomed to find his account in materials that other men rejected. The man who saw his way to extract profit out of the discounting of Skelterdale’s forged acceptances was not to be daunted by the difficulty of getting valuable service out of Samuel Grindley, and that unhappy lawyer did not disappoint his expectations. Cousins had seen that the want of self-control which had caused Grindley’s ruin could be compensated for by subjecting him to the stern will of another. Poor Grindley was at first thankful for the restraint which served him like a second nature; but he soon found that he had got a task-master more tyrannical and oppressive even than his own vices.

The compact between Cousins and Grindley was that the latter should be paid a small fixed weekly stipend, in return for which he should devote himself entirely to Cousins' business. Grindley received his money regularly, and contrived to live upon it. He was content until he began to see the huge profits which Cousins made out of his labours. He seemed to be perpetually making out bills of costs, showing how my Lord Skelterdale, Colonel Carew, the Honourable Mrs. Carew, and a host of other persons, including Mrs. Grosvenor Stapleton and her daughter—the latter a famous beauty, of whom all the town were talking just then, and whose relations with Cousins, like those of most of his clients, were strictly secret and confidential—were indebted to himself in enormous sums. *Sic vos non vobis*. The poor old man went to and fro between May Fair and his wretched lodging in Marylebone thinking of these magnificent figures, which reminded him painfully of the old days of his prosperity, and deploring the harshness of his task-master, who carefully intercepted all this current of gold. For Grindley dared not complain; Cousins' eye was a terror to him. The weak voice which made some men laugh caused the poor lawyer to quake

and tremble. The influence of the master was always upon him ; insomuch, that if Grindley drank now, it was stealthily and with a moderation to which he had long been unaccustomed. So far, the dread of Cousins operated beneficially ; but he had become a slave. He longed to return to the old reckless way of life among seedy suitors, and the miserable relatives of malefactors, who had doled him out, in a fitful and irregular way, the means by which he had lived. It was too late ; the days when he could raise twelve pounds without Cousins' aid had gone for ever.

Not the least of his miseries arose from a consciousness of his own inability to sustain the part which it was his duty daily to perform. With the old class of clients who held conferences with him in public-house parlours, or in retired nooks in the neighbourhood of the city police-courts, he had felt at ease. Fallen as he was, they were mostly inferior to himself in education and training, and they had treated him generally with a deference which was soothing to what little of pride he still retained. He had almost forgotten how to conduct himself with people of higher station ; but if he had not, a sense of the hollowness of his position would alone have embarrassed him so much as to

make his life in Cousins' employment a cruel torture. He was continually falling into the blunder of addressing clients too humbly, and then attempting to retrieve his position with an awkwardness which was puzzling to some of the uninitiated. When he knew that Cousins was in the house, with only a few feet of passage separating them, his embarrassment was painful enough; when his tyrant was absent for a brief while, Grindley's dread lest some client should step in, and, treating him like an independent person, entrap him into some step, some admission, some imprudent word, was more painful still.

Skelterdale, who was a frequent visitor there, was a terror to him, though one of a different kind. That young nobleman's unfortunate habit of blundering had led him to the conclusion that Grindley was a very important person indeed, and the bosom friend and confidant of the man whom it was so necessary to his lordship to conciliate. In this belief he had adopted the course of paying court to the poor old lawyer, who received his attentions like one who is painfully conscious of a fraud. Clumsily as Grindley had worn his new dignity, he had been only too successful in deceiving that simple-minded young man, who little thought how

his compliments jarred upon the unhappy Grindley, or how his lordship's harmless eye-glass intimidated him ; or how a condescending offer to take the old man for a drive while they ' talked over the business ' set him shaking with a dread lest Cousins should suddenly arrive and detect him in the act of listening to that daring proposition.

It is doubtful, indeed, whether Grindley would have had the courage, in any case, to throw off the yoke of this new master. The power of the great money-lender over him grew with time. Grindley performed for his employer even menial offices ; though before clients, Cousins addressed him with a respect which never for a moment cheated his unfortunate dependant into a hope of better usage. He knew well that when the stranger had departed his tyrant would reproach him with some clumsy blunder, some slip that he had made in his enactment of the difficult part of the trusted adviser of Mr. Cousins of May Fair. On such occasions, Cousins would curse him until the little lawyer in his agitation would drop pen or paper from his hand. Not unfrequently his master would beat him like a dog ; at which the poor old man would crouch after the manner of that animal, and slink away to an inner room, there to wring his hands, and

deplore his hard fate, and cry, as was his wont when troubled.

Sometimes, when returning from an errand on which he had been despatched by Cousins, on dark wintry nights, his dress-coat closely buttoned—for Grindley had dispensed with great-coats until they had become a superfluity—he would loiter awhile upon a bridge over a canal, or near the ornamental water in one of the parks, and look wistfully at the dark tide in which so many have sought a refuge from sorrows less than his. But he would shake his head and pass on, muttering sorrowfully, ‘No, no. I am too great a coward, or how could Cousins oppress me as he does?’

At other times, visions of escape would flit before his eyes; bright schemes for outwitting his tyrant in his own way; wild thoughts of grasping one of those cheques for bills of costs which were oftentimes paid to him, and were legally his, and defying Cousins to treating him as a criminal for taking his own. Thus provided, he meditated flying to some distant place where the tyrant would seek for him in vain. Such dreams brought him a strange pleasure. They were now the sole romance of his life; but they were little likely to be fulfilled. The very pictures of his daring fancy made him

tremble again, or if a passer-by brushed roughly against him the while, or touched him by chance with his hand, he would start as if the man he dreaded so much were close behind him and could read his thoughts. On such occasions the old man quickened his pace, and loitered no more until he reached a queer old house, where he let himself in with a latch-key, and mounted to his room.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TWO GARRETS.

GRINDLEY's retirement from City life had resulted in some improvement in his personal appearance; for decently respectable attire was absolutely necessary for the efficient discharge of the duties which he had undertaken in Cousins' service. If there had been the same necessity for sumptuous lodging, his task-master would probably have provided it, and set down the cost to the account of the stock and appliances of the business which he carried on. But once out of May Fair it mattered little to Cousins where his poor dependant lived. Grindley had therefore been left to take his own course in this matter, and had finally pitched upon an old dilapidated house in Marylebone, let out to many lodgers, where he had obtained a garret at a moderate rent.

It was not a cheerful locality. There was no thoroughfare there, a circumstance which always gives a mournful aspect to a street. Then the houses were all of red brick, which

had turned almost black with the soot of two centuries. Deep areas, green and damp for lack of wholesome light and air; iron rails half eaten away by rust; doors wanting in handles and knockers; windows with broken panes stuffed with rag, or covered with hideous patches of paper, were the objects which met his eye when first he had wandered that way. The spot was not attractive; but Grindley belonged to a class who, according to the proverb, cannot be choosers. His salary was too small to furnish meat, and drink, and decent shelter, and he was already footsore with walking about the streets of the west end of the town in quest of a lodging suited to his means. He observed the place for a moment, saw a bill in one of the houses, announcing that a room was to let for a respectable single man, knocked at the door, and settled the bargain with the landlady with a promptness and decision which he rarely displayed in the affairs of life.

In truth, the poverty and retirement of the spot were suited to his humour. He had broken with his old connections in the City; with the shabby clients about the Mansion House and Guildhall, and the cronies in the smoky public house in Sherborne Lane, and desired to be forgotten by them. He was both proud and

ashamed of his new life ; proud of his new offices, with the brass knocker and his name and description in full, but inwardly ashamed of that still lower degradation to which the once prosperous City gentleman had finally descended. It gladdened him, therefore, to think that the great folks who had business with him now in May Fair would not be likely ever to trace him to his miserable home. As with the poor actor who performs night by night the part of king in a procession, his existence had two phases painfully contrasting with each other. But with Grindley the hours were reversed. His dignity was worn by daylight only ; at the approach of dusk it vanished, and left him what he was—a poor, spiritless, feeble, broken, friendless man.

Grindley had little to amuse or help him to pass away the time in his garret ; snuff was his chief consoler, with the addition sometimes of a stale copy of a daily paper, which he read with spectacles on nose by the light of a wretched candle. It was, perhaps, due to this paucity of occupation for mind or body that he had one day become aware of the fact that the garret adjoining to his contained another lodger, who appeared to be in scarcely happier circumstances than his own.

This lodger had a curious habit of walking to and fro in his room, as if to make up by that monotonous form of exercise for the fact that he rarely went out. Business in May Fair does not begin early, and Mr. Grindley, who left home at a later hour than men of the humble class who live in garrets are wont to do, had observed that his neighbour was invariably in his room at that time.

If he left his room at all it was generally by night. Mr. Grindley speculated on this fact, and on the question of what might be the occupation of this solitary man. It was certain that he was very poor. Grindley's landlady, on the occasion of one of those weekly visits when rent became due, had declared her belief that the young man wanted food at times, but that he was too proud to confess his troubles. He seemed to speak to no one. Grindley had met him descending the stairs one evening, and had wished him good night, but the stranger had passed him as if too much engrossed with his own thoughts to return the salutation. On another occasion, the old man had seen him stealing along the street in a hurried, furtive manner, with his cap pulled over his eyes. This time, Grindley, moved by a harmless curiosity, had followed him a short way, and

had observed that he was respectably attired. The old lawyer would have followed him further, but for the fact that it was soon obvious that the object of his attentions had observed him. The occupant of the other garret appeared, indeed, to have a quick eye and ear for detecting any one watching him. He stopped, looked cautiously behind, quickened his pace, and soon disappeared in the haze of a wintry evening.

Grindley had learnt that when the young man had first come there he had gone out regularly each day, as if in quest of some employment; but that he had suddenly ceased to do so a short time before. There is, perhaps, some affinity among the wretched which draws them to each other. Grindley, in his miserable home, found a new pleasure in his speculations upon this man's way of life. Had he, like himself, a tyrant task-master for whom he performed some secret, perhaps some shameful services, for a pittance that left him to starve by day? Did he, too, wear respectable attire only as the livery of a despot, from whose thralldom he was powerless to escape? 'Ah! no,' he thought, 'that is impossible. If I had but youth and strength like his, what man dare insult me?' His heart beat faster with the thought, and the old days came back for awhile.

Grindley had never seen the young man's face but once, and its expression had not encouraged him. It wore a sullen and angry look, like that of one who has been soured by the world. Before this, he had often thought of tapping at his door, and offering him a newspaper or some other trifling civility, by way of making his acquaintance; but he had shrunk in his weak way from intruding on him. The poor lawyer felt the loss of the conversation of his old companions in the public-house parlour. He had always until then been a social man. He had a craving at times for society which would have made him thankful for a visit from his unhappy neighbour; but it was evident enough that he had no wish to be disturbed.

Sometimes, when the old man had missed for awhile the sound of footsteps in the next room, the thought had struck him that a man, distressed and proud, might be perishing of hunger in that solitary place, and none know of the fact until too late to help him. Grindley was poor enough himself; but at bottom he was tender-hearted. His miseries had only rendered him more sensitive to those of others like himself. He pitied his neighbour, and on such occasions listened anxiously for the sound of his footsteps again.

The house was one of many stories; the top floor on which Grindley and his neighbour lived was far above the noise of the basement. The sound of bells that rang for lodgers below only reached them in a faint tinkle. It was rare that any one mounted to the top of the house save the two occupants of the garrets. The loneliness of the place weighed more heavily upon the old man's spirit from the fact of the continual proximity of his misanthropic fellow-lodger.

One evening, when the old man had been listening in this way for the footsteps of his neighbour, he had dropped asleep in a chair beside his truckle bed. A noise, as if some heavy article had been thrown down in the adjoining room, awoke him. He rubbed his eyes, and looked around. The dusk had deepened into night. His little fire of cinders had dropped out. The room was chill.

Grindley walked out on to the landing, and peered into the darkness down the great staircase; but there was no one there.

'It must have been in my neighbour's room,' he thought. Then the old man took a few sticks of wood, with some paper and a match, and stooped down to light his fire again in the miserable grate.

Some oppressive odour seemed to have entered the room. Attributing it to the vapour rising from the wood that he had kindled, he went to his window, and raised it slightly. But the odour seemed to increase. It was strongest near the old cracked wainscoting which separated his garret from that of the man who had so often occupied his thoughts.

Grindley trembled. He was compelled to sit down upon the edge of the bed to think awhile.

‘Oh, dear,’ he muttered, ‘there is something wrong. What shall I do?’

He lighted a candle; but his hand shook so violently that the operation consumed some minutes. He was glad of the temporary respite that this afforded from the dreaded necessity of making up his mind. When it was done, he hesitated still. He strove to cry out for help; but his voice dwindled away into a childish note. He dropped upon his knees on the floor, covered his face with his hands, and cried bitterly.

‘God forgive me,’ he murmured. ‘I cannot go. I am not made to face trouble. Some one else must hasten there. I know they will have to break the door. I haven’t the strength. Oh, help! I am only a poor feeble old man.’

He might have cried long before any echo

of those pitiable words could have reached the ear of any other. Meanwhile the strange odour seemed to have become stronger.

At length a wondrous impulse seized him. He arose, grasped the candle in one hand, and went out upon the landing. As he had anticipated, his neighbour's door was closed and fastened. He knocked, but no response came. He endeavoured to survey the room through the keyhole, but the place was dark as if the aperture had been closed with something thrust into it.

The old man pushed against the door with all his power, but it did not move. He planted his feet upon the banisters, and flung himself violently against the door again. His excitement increased. He seemed to be endowed for the moment with the strength and courage of his early days. The old lock yielded, the door gave way ; the room stood open before him.

A stifling vapour issued from it, which compelled him to pause, weak and panting with the exertion, on the threshold. By degrees, the newly-admitted current of air made it possible to enter. Grindley saw at a glance the scene that had been enacted there.

A hand-grate stood upon the hearth, full of burning embers. The narrow chimney-place

was stuffed with the strips of threadbare carpet taken from the floor. His unhappy neighbour, overcome by the fumes of the fire which he had evidently kindled for his own destruction, had fallen across his chair with head and arms resting on the table.

Grindley cried no more for help now. The wild strength that possessed him thrilled him with a pleasure that he had not known for many a year, and he felt a pride in the prospect of saving a man from death without aid from any other hand. With almost furious energy he tore the carpets away from the chimney. The air was still oppressive, but it was fast becoming purer.

The man at the table was still insensible ; but Grindley heard him moan. The old man raised his head a little, took up the candle, and surveyed him anxiously. There was water at hand in a bedroom jug, with which he sprinkled the face of the sufferer. Then he loosened his neck-cloth, unbuttoned his shirt, and pulled it open wide.

The candle was still in Grindley's hand. Some strange signs upon the young man's breast suddenly caught his eye. He looked at them a moment, then drew the shirt over them again, and buttoned it loosely.

‘Poor wretch! What right have I to pry into secrets?’ said the old man, and his weak tears flowed again. The stranger had found compassion in one not less persecuted or weary of life.

The marks which Grindley had discovered on the breast of his unfortunate fellow-lodger were a scar like that of a bullet wound, and a D traced in blue dots upon the left side.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MORROW.

MR. GRINDLEY left home a little later than usual on the following morning ; but there was still abundant time, with sharp walking, for reaching May Fair before the hour at which Cousins was accustomed to make his appearance there. The little old man was in unusual spirits. He had spent the whole of that night in tending his unhappy fellow-lodger, but he scarcely felt weary yet. The novelty of his position as a friend and consoler of the unfortunate had maintained his excitement at the highest pitch. He had been in no humour to eat breakfast. His mind was full of projects. He had taken the man whom he had rescued from death under his protection. The strong had come to be sheltered by the weak ; the needy and wretched by one whose poverty and misery had seemed but yesterday more than he could endure.

Any one of his acquaintance who had met him that morning might have imagined that

the lawyer's small stock of brains had given way under the pressure of his troubles. He swung his arms to and fro, and talked to himself as he walked. He waved aside the offers of hawkers and newspaper vendors at street-corners with an unwonted dignity, as of one who had weighty affairs on hand, and whose meditations must not be disturbed.

Such notions, indeed, would not have been wholly unfounded. His schemes had begun by being modest and humble. The mouse had helped the lion in the fable: why should not he, poor, and weak, and wretched as he was, do something to assist even one so much younger and stronger than himself? Such had been at first the tenor of his reflections, but the prospect had expanded. He was a man—ostensibly, at least—in a good position of life. Important persons paid court to him; illustrious names were on his books; powerful individuals had professed themselves under obligations, and anxious to serve him in any way he could suggest. Now was the time to put their protestations to the test. Not for himself. He would never have dared even to think of soliciting anything on his own account. He knew well, too, that if he had, his habitual irresolution would be fatal to any hope of his profiting by

it. But this stranger, who was already indebted to him so much, was of a different stamp. He was evidently a man of good education. He wanted but a chance of rising—only one foot on the ladder—to be free. He had a powerful frame, a shrewd head, as the old man had felt from a certain decisiveness of manner visible in him when he had recovered from the temporary effects of his desperate act. There was some sad history connected with him, as was indicated by those strange signs which he had accidentally discovered. But he did not care to enquire into this. His neighbour's manner had impressed him as that of an honest man, and Samuel Grindley had determined to befriend him.

It will, perhaps, detract a little from the romance of Mr. Grindley's character, that with this desire to raise up one who had fallen, this strange sympathy with a man who, like himself, had dropped away in the battle of life, this craving for society and fellowship, arising out of his degraded and solitary condition, was mingled some amount of more selfish considerations. His imagination ran riot in many ways, and among others it took the direction of the benefits which might accrue to himself in the future from the gratitude which his protégé

could not fail to feel towards his deliverer. Who could blame him for dreaming awhile of a new hope of escape from the thralldom of Cousins' rule? And even these dreams were as much for the good of his new acquaintance as for his own. They were, after all, dreams of this stranger's advancement in the world—of *his* prosperity and happiness—of which the miserable old man would be happy indeed if only a few crumbs should fall to his lot. Grindley was alone in the world: his wife was dead and gone; relatives had long since abandoned him; he had never had a child. What if this young man, mindful of that terrible night when the poor weak creature discovered him at the point of death, and for the first time for many years found strength to do a resolute act, should come to feel towards him as a son? Stranger things had come to pass in this world, he thought, as he hurried on his way still musing and muttering, and dispensing his airy patronage.

Though busy with these day-dreams, he had walked at a quick pace; he was approaching May Fair, and there was still some time to spare. Grindley looked at the clocks in shops as he passed, and found them all agreed on that point. One in particular, in which he had

learnt to have faith, plainly indicated that he might loiter yet ten minutes and escape reproof. It was a critical point in his history. He glanced behind him in a strange furtive way, and walked up a by-street, where he paced to and fro for a few moments.

His head was in a whirl; but a sense of weakness arising from the reaction of the excitement of that night and his long fast, had stolen upon him. He felt a dread lest his powers should not hold out, and he should break down in the task which he had assigned to himself. He regretted now the absorption which had led to his going without food that morning; but there was no time to procure a breakfast with any hope of being punctual at Cousins'.

In this stage of his reflections it appeared to him to be expedient that he should take some trifling stimulant. There is a beverage well known to tipplers of Mr. Grindley's class under the name of purl, and much famed among sophists inclined to find excuses for drinking at an early hour of the day for its assumed stomachic qualities. It was with this drink, which being kept ready-prepared on the counters of certain places of entertainment, chiefly in the neighbourhood of the market-places of

the metropolis, Mr. Grindley finally determined to refresh himself.

Yet he hesitated a moment longer, walked to the very door of the house where he knew that this once favoured drink was likely to be found, peered in, and saw that there was no customer at the bar. The street was retired enough, and little likely to be frequented by Cousins or any of his clients. He entered, and twitching nervously at his gloves, threw down a sixpence on the counter, and drank the bewitching draught.

It was a fearful joy. The excitement under which he laboured, and the fact that he had previously eaten nothing, rendered the liquor doubly potent. A fire ran through his veins. His dull eyes sparkled for awhile. His weak and trembling frame grew strong and youthful again. Cousins had few terrors for him now. An exaggerated faith in his own sagacity stole upon him. It seemed to him a happy inspiration that had led him to take that moderate stimulant before venturing to encounter the man who had oppressed him so long. Nay, he even fancied that it was solely for want of that artificial aid that he had hitherto been so miserably deficient in the spirit which would have rendered such tyranny impossible. Under the influence of these delusions the lawyer ventured

on another glass, then upon another ; after which a suspicion began to haunt him that he had had enough, and that it was time to make his way to the office in May Fair.

But these wiser counsels did not long prevail. No sooner did the unhappy Grindley find himself again in the open air than his courage rose once more, until it finally reached a pitch at which the tyrant Cousins began to wear the aspect rather of a bugbear calculated to inspire fear in the breasts of weak women and young children, than an object worthy of serious consideration from Mr. Grindley of May Fair, the trusted confidant of so many matters in which aristocratic names were concerned. Punctuality no longer presented itself to his mind as a thing of any moment. What right had Cousins, forsooth, to treat him like a truant schoolboy? Was it to be supposed that a gentleman, a man of the world, a solicitor of nearly fifty years' standing in the city of London, had no affairs of his own to explain the fact of his arriving, for once, somewhat later than usual? Inspired with these views, Mr. Grindley, still muttering to himself, raised his hand aloft and snapped his thumb and middle finger in the air—or rather, made an ineffectual effort so to do, for the action gave forth no audible sound. In fact, he was

already in an advanced stage of intoxication—a circumstance which, though still unknown to himself, was obvious enough to boys at street-corners, who greeted him with derisive cheers, at which Mr. Grindley would turn back and make a gesture as if desiring, if he could have reached them, to chastise their impertinence.

It was not until he had stopped again more than once for additional draughts of the fluid which had endowed him with these courageous ideas, that he finally presented himself at his office in May Fair. Even the approach of the fatal moment of meeting with his task-master, failed to renew in him any trace of the old feeling of dread with which he had so often ascended those steps. The door was open as usual as he walked in, and, staggering down the passage, flung wide the little door of Cousins' office without knocking, and boldly confronted that gigantic bill-discounter.

CHAPTER XIV.

BARNARDISTON'S BANK.

It has already been remarked, on the occasion of introducing Mr. Cousins to the reader, and of explaining the peculiar nature of the business transactions of that daring money-lender, that he occasionally made mistakes. It happened that he had only that morning made a discovery strikingly illustrative of this proposition, the result of which was to leave him in a mood which boded ill for the unhappy lawyer's chances of pardon for his first relapse into his old vice.

There flourished some years since, as many who read this story may remember, a firm of bankers who traded in Saint James's Street, London, under the style of Barnardiston, Chalonier & Gray. It was an old-established house, of good credit among the aristocratic class who kept their cash in that establishment. Its name was suggestive of old-fashioned business of a profitable kind. No trader below the status of a merchant ever ventured to make application

for opening an account there ; and even the few mercantile names on its books were those of men who had already turned their backs upon City life ; who had left the practical management of their business to active partners, and were preparing to be the founders of families, and to claim kindred with the high and mighty who prided themselves on writing cheques on scraps of note-paper, and on keeping a handsome balance in the hands of Barnardiston, Challoner & Gray.

Subsequent proceedings in the courts of law have long since revealed to the public eye the true position of that once flourishing and venerable firm, but as yet it is probable that no man outside the walls of the bank parlour, except Cousins himself, had a suspicion of the fact that it would have been prudent on the part of any gentleman, who had deposited cash or securities in Barnardiston's old-established bank, to get those valuables into his own hands again at the earliest possible period.

There were yet, however, good hopes of Barnardiston & Company retrieving their fortune ; and this was the fact on which Cousins had speculated. There was nothing remarkable in the history of the troubles of the bank. A loss sustained by the firm through the failure of a

great army contractor in the year of the peace was the original source of its embarrassments. In the hope of recovering their position, the partners had, in the usual course of such things, ventured upon secret speculations of a hazardous kind ; then came years of panic, in which speculators clamoured for support under secret threats of stopping payment, and so involving the bank and themselves in the common ruin. Long before this the 'tenth transmitter' of the name of Barnardiston had privately withdrawn, taking out of the bank what he called 'his share' of the capital. The only Challoner remaining in the firm had been equally far-seeing ; and had seceded at an early period, on the occasion of his marriage with a noble lady. These things had attracted little attention. The style of the firm was still unchanged, and there was a vague notion abroad that the estates of Barnardiston, and the private property of Challoner and his noble wife, were still among the substantial securities for its stability. But, in truth, this was an idea which few regarded as of practical importance. The reputation of Barnardiston's rested upon the far more effective basis of public opinion. It had withstood the shock of '97, in which the Bank of England itself had suspended cash payments. Commercial

panics had left unharmed a house which had so few relations with the mercantile world. Drains of bullion had little to do with Barnardiston & Company. Suspensions of the Bank Charter had never disturbed the tranquillity of its polished counters, or caused one carriage the more to draw up at its doors in Saint James's Street.

Cousins' relations had been entirely with Mr. Arthur Gray, the sole remaining representative of the firm. This unhappy young gentleman had called upon him on the death of his father, a few years before, and in a private conference had invited Cousins to re-discount, as it is called, certain acceptances endorsed by noble and prosperous customers of the bank, amounting on the whole to a heavy sum. The affair was to be strictly confidential; the bills were a thoroughly good security; the terms offered were above the rate at which money, which was just then abundant, could then be easily borrowed.

Cousins was taken by surprise; but he divined in a little while the true position of the house of Barnardiston & Company, and prepared, as was his habit, to take advantage of this piece of exclusive information. There was no possibility of being mistaken. The bank was embarrassed; it could not wait for the day when these ac-

ceptances would be honoured, yet would not venture to re-discount them in the open market. Cousins glanced at the dates, and found that there was not one document among the number which was yet a week old. It was evident, then, that the bank could only have acquired them in exchange for hard cash within a few days. It was impossible that it could have demanded from the original holders any higher rate of interest than was current at the time. The bank would, therefore, actually lose money on the transaction. The experienced Cousins came, accordingly, to the correct conclusion that Barnardiston & Company, while they dared not refuse loans to old customers, were in the painful dilemma of having no really available funds to lend.

It was out of the season at which his profligate young friends were in town. He had considerable sums both of his own and others at command, which were then lying idle. Here was no opportunity for one of those great strokes in which he delighted. This was no affair of sixty per cent. ; but it more than made up for these defects by the magnitude of the transaction and the certainty of the returns. Cousins, in fact, had never done a better morning's work than he achieved that day. He had

always had kinds of business which could only be transacted by himself, and of which no one else was permitted to have any knowledge. His loans to the firm of Barnardiston & Company were among these. After a while, these negotiations were generally settled in the parlour of the banking-house, where a call from the well-known bill-discounter attracted no attention. By degrees the nature of the transactions became less simple, and took the form of those more hazardous investments in which he felt himself more at home. Cousins fully believed that the bank would tide over its difficulties. Arthur Gray was energetic and enthusiastic. The business of Barnardiston & Company was still a valuable one. It wanted only time and prudence, with the absence of all suspicion in the public mind, to restore it to prosperity. Gray believed this, and had at last convinced Cousins of the truth of his view. Thus everything depended on Cousins, for a breath from him would have destroyed the great house. For this reason, Cousins knew well that there was no creditor of the bank who would be so certain to be paid as himself; and as long as Gray did not press him for increased advances, he felt convinced that he was not losing ground. In this conviction he rested secure, and for some

years absorbed no inconsiderable portion of the bonâ fide gains which that venerated establishment was able to secure.

Arthur Gray was still a young man. His years had not numbered thirty yet. He possessed a handsome figure; his glossy black hair, becoming slightly thin only in the front, gave a more intellectual look to his fine forehead; his features were regular; his skin clear, though pale; his dark blue eyes almost feminine in their softness. Two rows of perfectly white teeth, though slightly marred in their effect by a somewhat artificial habit of smiling, were not the least of those attractions in society which caused him to be flattered, courted, and admired. But he was also a man of taste and culture. He had distinguished himself at Oxford; could turn an ode of Horace into English without entirely destroying the grace and neatness and classical finish of the original; and had contributed to a volume of Latin poetry published by a noble lord and college friend, who had since become a rising statesman, some specimens of hexametre verse of the purest Latinity, and of almost Ovidian sweetness.

It had been the desire of the elder Gray that his son should rank in the world as a man of

fashion ; such a wish was not the mere offspring of parental fondness. An elegant manner, though perhaps of small value in Lombard Street, was no inconsiderable item in the stock-in-trade of the sole representative of Barnardiston's house. That important personage was called upon to hold conferences with members of some of the oldest and noblest families in the land. It was not to be supposed that such customers would consent to entrust balances in the hands of a boor.

Arthur Gray, whose chief fault was that of having come too late into the world, when the real strength of the bank had departed, performed his part to perfection. Shifts and struggles were his chief heritage ; but his pleasant voice and frequent smiles afforded no hint of the secrets which were gnawing at his heart. His tone was generally cheerful ; his chat had a certain grace which gave an interest even to trifles. As to dress, he was always perfect, even in business hours. No sombre grey, no staid cravats, or broad-brimmed hats, such as City men affect, but fashionable attire, that had little savour of business in it ; elegant frock coats, neat trousers strapped under the boot, as befits one who rides in the Row ; waistcoats of the newest pattern, and cut in compliance with the

latest edicts of the sartorial despots of Burlington Gardens, to whom Cousins had sold his old business. It was no unusual thing to see him walk over from his delightful bachelor house overlooking the Green Park, in St. James's Place, wearing jingling spurs, as if business were but a pleasant prelude to the afternoon's ride. He wore a long moustache, too, a thing rarely known among men of business until later years. His appearance was more like that of one of those officers in the Guards who stared from club windows near by, than that of the dealer in money, the trusted repository of other people's cash, the respected master of bald-headed clerks who handled copper shovels and weighed gold in scales. These things, however, instead of daunting customers, only strengthened the hold of the bank upon the favour of the fashionable world. Nor were the differences between Mr. Arthur Gray and City bankers of the old school more striking, perhaps, than the contrast which his room at the bank presented compared with their dingy penetralia. This apartment was light and airy and cheerful, with modern plate-glass windows let into the ancient frames. It was elegantly furnished with *escritoire*, and *fauteuils*, and pictures. Noble patrons who called here would loiter awhile to talk, and, in order

to show their contempt for the sober habits of goldsmiths and money-changers eastward of Temple Bar, would even smoke cigars in business hours within the sacred precincts. Cousins, when he called there, had detected the odour of choice tobacco-leaf pervading the apartment ; but he was too familiar with the ways of fashionable clients to note the fact as either unbusiness-like or of ill omen for the final restoration of the fortunes of the house.

Not the least among the grounds for anticipating that glorious result was the fact that Arthur Gray was personally so much admired in aristocratic circles.

‘With your figure,’ Cousins would say, ‘you might marry an earl’s daughter, or better still, a fond dowager of fortune. Head of a famous, almost historical establishment, boasting an unspotted reputation, the manners of a first-class dandy—with such advantages, there are fellows who would set the bank on its legs again by one happy stroke in the matrimonial market.’

Perhaps Arthur Gray had thought of this before ; possibly the difficulty of making a satisfactory settlement stood in the way ; though such obstacles as these have been overcome before now. Anyway, the various rumours of his probable marriage with some distinguished

lady had died away one by one, and now, at nine-and-twenty, he was still a bachelor, and insensible, as might have been supposed, to the advantages to be derived from Cousins' sovereign remedy for the troubles of the bank.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. GROSVENOR STAPLETON.

ON the very morning of Grindley's late appearance in May Fair, Mr. Cousins had been meditating again upon this important subject, when a clerk had announced the name of Mrs. Grosvenor Stapleton. This lady, who was very well known to the fashionable world, was not exactly one of the secret customers of Cousins; but his pecuniary transactions with her were nevertheless of a delicate nature.

He saw her in private in his inner room. It was the old story. She wanted money again, and had not anything which could correctly be called security to offer. But her prospects were good; never were better. The long-expected event of her daughter's marriage was near at hand. The petted and flattered belle of the day—a young lady, who had proved her sense of her own worth, and had triumphantly vindicated herself from the charge of being an adventuress trading under the guidance of a wily mother in her beauty and accomplishments,

by absolutely rejecting the hand of the heir to an earldom—was at length about to contract an alliance with a gentleman of high position and of great wealth, whose allowance of pin-money alone would probably suffice to clear these paltry sums, or who, anyway, would not permit his wife's debts to go long unpaid.

‘What is the name of this happy gentleman?’ enquired Cousins.

‘Arthur Gray, of Barnardiston & Company,’ replied the lady. ‘You know him, doubtless.’

‘I—I do,’ replied the money-lender, who was quite unprepared for this significant disclosure.

‘Arthur, you know,’ continued the lady, as she adjusted a double gold eye-glass upon her hawk-like nose, ‘is the firm itself. Barnardiston, Challoner & Gray, means, in fact, simply our dear young friend.’

‘So I have understood,’ returned Cousins; ‘but you must forgive me for saying that this is one of the most improbable stories which I have heard for some time.’

‘You incredulous man,’ said the lady playfully. ‘Now, why improbable? Pray tell me why.’

‘Madam,’ replied Cousins, ‘the town talks of your daughter, as you know. When she jilted my young friend Skelterdale, did not all

London ring with the news within twenty-four hours?’

‘The young man is an idiot, who used to make himself ridiculous at one time by publicly paying court to that gay old dowager the Honourable Mrs. Carew,’ rejoined the lady. ‘He blabbed the whole story of my daughter’s rejection of his offer, and got laughed at for his pains.’

‘So with Colonel Hawker,’ interposed Cousins. ‘Did we not all know when your daughter snubbed him? Did not the papers print the story each time with dashes, and hyphens, and initial letters? Was there any secret then?’

‘My dear Cousins,’ returned the lady, ‘you must consider the differences in the men. Skelterdale was a penniless fool, with nothing to boast of but his chance of inheriting the Somerton property, which is remote enough. He had no need for caution. Hawker went bragging, and was enthusiastic enough to thrash gentlemen who spoke slightly of Laura. Very good of him that; but such things make a noise, and so people talked. But Arthur is a grave, public man; the affairs of a large concern are on his mind. He is compelled to be discreet and cautious.’

Cousins’ grey eye twinkled with satisfaction

at the discovery of this underhand courtship. Concerning the reasons for Gray's secrecy, he could, if he had chosen, have enlightened Mrs. Stapleton much more completely than she imagined; but he preferred to affect incredulity still.

'Mr. Arthur Gray,' he said, 'is a gentleman who lives in the eye of the world. If he has honourable intentions towards Miss Stapleton, what need has he for concealment?'

Mrs. Stapleton rose; she was now really angry, as any one could have seen. 'Mr. Cousins,' she said, 'I am under obligations to you—in your power, if you will have it so; but does this give you the right to insult me? What man ever dared approach my daughter with dishonourable views?'

'Let us be calm, madam,' replied Cousins. 'Pray sit down. If this information be correct, you can surely give me proofs.'

Mrs. Stapleton took her seat again; her hand trembled with anger as she took a small pocket-book of russia leather lined with green silk from the pocket of her dress.

'I feel that I am doing wrong,' she said, 'but I must trust to your honour not to betray me. Here is a letter which will satisfy you. But Arthur must not know this for the world.'

Cousins took the pocket-book, extracted from it the paper, and read it carefully. It was enough for his purpose. It was a passionate letter, though containing no glowing protestations of love. There could be as little doubt of the fact that the writer was really enthralled in the snares of Laura Stapleton, as of the genuineness of the handwriting. Cousins knew it well enough, as well as he knew the signature, which was unmistakably that of his unfortunate client.

He put off for the present Mrs. Stapleton's application for further advances; and having dismissed that lady as soon as he was able, took his hat, and walked down Bolton Row and Piccadilly till he came to Saint James's Street. He stopped at the door of Barnardiston's bank in that well-known thoroughfare, and enquired of a fat porter in livery, who sat in a great hall-chair of green leather studded with brass nails, whether Mr. Gray had arrived.

'Not yet, sir,' said the man; 'but we expect him soon.'

Cousins was impatient. He walked across the road, and turned down the secluded street which bears the name of Saint James's Place, very sure of meeting Arthur Gray if he had not left home, for the street has but one entrance. But he did not meet him, and to his application

at the door of his house, received the answer that he had left home an hour before.

These failures irritated him. He returned towards his own house in an angry mood, which was not softened when he met the man of whom he was in quest in the region of May Fair, and in the very street in which Mrs. Stapleton and her famous daughter resided. 'He is coming from a morning call there,' thought the bill-discounter; but Cousins did not accost him. He merely turned back, and followed the banker unperceived until he saw him enter the banking-house.

Gray had scarcely placed his hat upon the table, and sat down to decipher his letters, when Cousins was announced. He saw at once that something had happened which had disturbed the serenity of his visitor.

Cousins closed the door carefully behind him.

'Few words are best,' he said. 'Your affair with Laura Stapleton must go no further. I know her and her mother too. Drop her, and you have a chance; marry her, and this great establishment may as well put a notice at once upon its doors.'

Arthur Gray coloured slightly; he was a proud man, but Cousins had him in his grip. He could not deny the affair; but he protested

that it would necessarily be of slow growth—that he was himself aware that it would be imprudent to marry then—that the hope of getting such a prize would stimulate him to fresh efforts to retrieve himself. He even offered to pledge his word that all Cousins' advances should be repaid before he would make the lady an offer of marriage. But it was of no avail.

‘You are mad,’ said Cousins. ‘The girl’s mother would inveigle a saint; and her daughter would ruin the Bank of England itself. Come; you used to be a fellow of sense before this syren took you. Be a man, and think of what you have to do. The very rumour of such a marriage would cause a run upon you which would bring this old concern in one morning toppling down about your ears.’

Necessity oftentimes makes proud men humble, simple men crafty, honest men shifty and unscrupulous. Arthur Gray prevaricated, and gave promises which he meant to keep only in the letter, for he loved the bewitching Laura Stapleton too deeply to relinquish her. ‘She will be patient,’ he thought, with the infatuation of an ardent lover, ‘and meanwhile these calumnies will not affect me. With a little prudence we may see each other still; and the

time may come, ere long, when I can defy this vulgar bully, and treat him as he deserves.'

But Cousins left him convinced that Gray would take his advice. 'I have opened his eyes,' he thought; for the case was so simple, the truth of his warnings so obvious, that it appeared to him to be impossible that Gray could not see the dangers he had pointed out. But other doubts began to distress him. The banker had hitherto always seemed to possess the merit of an open and straightforward character. He had told him frankly the position of his affairs, had produced books and documents in support of his statements, until Cousins had believed himself comparatively safe even in walking on that treacherous ground. If some panic did not drive people to distress the bank, he felt no doubt of its being able to conceal its insolvency for almost an indefinite period, and panics were not very likely to affect Barnardiston & Company. But all this was based upon faith in the character of Arthur Gray. What if that gentleman were only a plausible rogue? What if books and papers were cooked and prepared? What if the position of affairs were far worse than he had confessed?

It was his secrecy in the matter of Laura Stapleton which had alarmed him. It was the

first sign of studied concealment which had reached his practised eye. And the question was very serious to him. From first to last he had made large profits out of Barnardiston & Company. Much of its debt to him was composed of fictitious loans representing extravagant interest and interest upon interest; but as the account then stood, the bank at least confessed a debt to him of nearly thirty-five thousand pounds. Such a stake might well have disturbed the equanimity of a calmer man than Cousins; for to press for it would be to destroy the bank and to sacrifice all for a paltry dividend; while by patience he would probably recover the whole, unless he had been tricked all this time. This was the question which caused Mr. Cousins' brow to darken as he entered his little room again in the house in May Fair. The thought that he was dependent entirely on Arthur Gray himself for all his information about the bank became more and more alarming. But it was difficult to see in what way he could help himself. It was probable that no clerk in the bank, unless it were Mr. Edmunds, the manager, an aged and trusted servant of the firm, had any inkling of its true position. To bribe him for information would be impossible. There were others there who had means of getting at

valuable facts if the hint were given them—who could, at least, have told him something about the ordinary customers of the bank—who might have solved for him the significant question of whether the Stapletons, mother or daughter, were indebted to it for advances. All these were indications of great importance to Cousins' plans; but he dared trust no one, or if he had, what hold could he have obtained upon his informant to render him sure that he was really devoted to his service?

It happened that it was while he was in the midst of these harassing reflections, that the door of Cousins' room had opened so abruptly, and the unhappy Grindley had made his appearance on the threshold. Cousins had been so much occupied that morning, that he was as yet unaware of the fact that his needy dependant had been missing until then. A glance revealed to him the true condition of the intruder. Cousins then raised his eyes to the time-piece on the mantel-shelf. It was two o'clock.

'You ruffian!' he exclaimed, almost white with rage. 'How dare you come here drunk at this hour of the day?'

Mr. Grindley was not so far gone in the degrees of intoxication but that he could feel something of the terror of that voice; but his

courage had not evaporated yet. Dignity seemed to him to require that this ungentlemanly address should be met with firmness; even though it should lead to the ruin of those dazzling schemes for the benefit of his unhappy neighbour with which his mind had been so much occupied that morning.

‘Mr. Cousins,’ he answered, with a certain solemnity, though with an indistinctness of utterance which it would be in vain to endeavour to imitate by any sort of variations from strict orthography, ‘you’ve bullied and plundered me too long, sir; but there’s no necessity for quarrelling. Give me a week’s notice, and let me go.’

‘Not till I’ve done with you,’ roared Cousins. ‘You incorrigible tippler. Did I pick you out of the dirt; put you in decent clothing; set you up in the world again, and give you one more chance of reform, to have my house disgraced like this?’

Not daunted yet, the infatuated Grindley leaned with one hand upon the back of a chair, and bringing to bear upon Cousins an upward gaze, not altogether inadequate, in his own opinion, to the quelling of that angry spirit, he hiccuped forth the words—

‘Picked me out of the dirt, did you? Men pick gold, too, out of the dirt sometimes. Who

got eight hundred pounds out of a poor broken-hearted fallen man in one year; and wouldn't allow him enough out of it to get a decent lodging?'

But Cousins' patience was exhausted. He rushed upon the daring Grindley, and dealt him a blow which sent him reeling to the ground. The chair fell with him with a noise which startled the clerks in the adjoining room, but they did not venture to interfere. Cousins' vengeance, however, was still unsatiated. He seized the unhappy lawyer by the collar of his coat, raised him with one hand, shook him as a giant might a dwarf, and finally deposited him, breathless and exhausted, in a fire-proof closet close behind him; of which he closed the great iron door and turned the key in the lock.

It is a peculiarity of habitual drinkers, and one from which Mr. Grindley was certainly not free, that they are subject to very sudden revulsions of feeling. No sooner did that unhappy lawyer find himself in the dismal prison to which Cousins had consigned him, than he began to sink into a despondent mood, very different from that spirit of defiance with which he had confronted his tyrant employer. The place of his captivity, indeed, was not calculated to raise the spirits. It was a square stone

chamber, into which no light could find its way save a single ray through the keyhole of the massive lock. It was haunted by the oppressive smell of leathern bindings of the great ledgers and account-books which were stored there. It was chill and gloomy as a vault in a cemetery, to which cheerless receptacle for the dead it bore, even in Mr. Grindley's imagination, no slight resemblance. A large iron safe upon the ground against the wall was the only seat that it afforded; and on this cold resting-place the imprisoned man sat long, holding his aching head between his hands, and moaning and bewailing his unhappy destiny.

When Cousins opened the door again some two hours later he found his prisoner in that maudlin stage of intoxication which is the first step towards returning sobriety. Grindley now implored pardon on his knees, and even praised his tyrant's generosity, accusing himself of black ingratitude towards him. Finally, he entreated him to let him return home, and in his drunken humour went deeply into the history of his adventure of the night before, by way of showing that the excitement which had led to that relapse into his old vice was altogether an exceptional thing, and one not without excuses perfectly intelligible to humane and charitable

minds. His stern gaoler heard him patiently, but unmoved.

‘Not yet,’ he said; ‘you are progressing, but drunk still. Another hour will do you good.’

Cousins was certainly not mistaken in his view of the sobering qualities of the treatment which he was administering to his unhappy victim. Mr. Grindley was rapidly recovering his senses, but the cup of his miseries was not yet full.

With returning reason came a new subject for anxiety and remorse. This was the question of what he had said to Cousins on the subject of his protégé. He had a vague sense of having told him about the discovery of his forlorn condition on the night before—of having vaunted his power and attainments, and of having asked Cousins to give him employment. But mingled with this was a haunting suspicion that in his drunken confidences he had told the secret of the strange discovery that he had made—the marks that he had found upon the breast of his unfortunate neighbour. The thought distressed him more than his own miseries. He could not tell what use Cousins might make of it. Cousins was, he knew, a vindictive man, and Grindley had confessed that his defalcation

from sober habits had been caused solely by their acquaintance. Then he moaned again, and deplored the unlucky accident by which he had become possessed of a secret, the divulging of which might bring down greater misfortunes still upon his neighbour's head.

When Cousins finally released him that evening, Mr. Grindley's mind was relieved by the discovery that the angry mood of his employer had vanished. He promised forgiveness on the understanding that the punishment which his legal adviser had received would be remembered, and would be a lesson to him.

'And now,' said Cousins, 'as to this man who wants employment.' He looked about on his table, and found a little bundle of papers, tied with red tape, which he handed to the lawyer.

Grindley trembled.

'Go home,' continued Cousins, 'and set him on these. Here are accounts to be disentangled, and some documents to be condensed according to my written instructions. If he has any brains, let him show it by the way he completes this work. Bring me the result to-morrow. If I am satisfied, I may be able to find him employment.'

The old man was overjoyed. He took the

papers, hid them in the pocket of his dress coat, and slunk away.

He arrived punctually the next morning, bringing with him the required test of his neighbour's abilities.

'What is this man's name?' inquired Cousins.

Grindley had never asked the question, and he could not answer it.

'No matter,' said Cousins. 'Bring him here to-morrow.'

Grindley brought his new friend with him the following morning, and introduced him to Cousins, in the little back room, under the name of Philip Joyce.

Cousins surveyed him carefully, and asked him a few questions, which his visitor answered to his satisfaction. Then he dismissed the expectant Grindley.

'I can serve you,' he said, addressing the young man, as soon as they were alone. 'But you must be prudent. There is an opening for a clerk in Barnardiston's. Lord Skelterdale will recommend you. Henceforth, if we meet, you will not recognise me. Be discreet. Your future will depend on this.'

CHAPTER XVI.

HAUNTED.

THREE days after the interview with Cousins, Grindley's fellow-lodger, whose assumed name of Philip Joyce will not have concealed his identity from the reader, was installed as ledger clerk in Barnardiston's famous banking house. Arthur Gray's old manager, Mr. Edmunds, had contrived to make a place for him in deference to the recommendation of Lord Skelterdale, whose mother, Lady Sommerton, since the Commission of Lunacy which had decided that her husband was incapable of managing his own affairs, had been one of the best customers on the books of the bank.

The manager of Barnardiston's was not long in perceiving that there would be no reason for repenting of his kindness; for the new clerk applied himself to his duties with a grave earnestness which quickly raised him to favour. But except the manager, he had no friend in the bank. His brother clerks disliked him, as Jackson had done, because they were jealous of his

powers ; but they had another and a less discreditable reason. He was an unsociable man. He rarely spoke, save on a matter of business, and after banking hours he disappeared, and held no communication with his companions of the day.

There was, moreover, a mystery about him of that kind which generally renders a man unpopular. No one knew who he was or whence he came ; and he was not a man likely to volunteer information on those points. As the clock struck nine he invariably appeared in the morning at the door of the bank, and closing time rarely found him with his labours unfinished. He went away as he came — silently, even stealthily. In the street he walked at a pace which would have rendered it difficult for any one, bent on deciding the debated question of where he lived, to have followed him on foot.

Besides that he had a habit, as more than one had observed, of halting after turning a street corner, and of there waiting awhile. Such a device indicated a dread of being observed ; but for what reason ? Some declared their belief, founded on the fact of his having been seen in that neighbourhood, that he was sojourning in the locality of Saint Giles's, until such time as his salary would allow him to remove to more fashionable quarters. But his habits remained

too long unchanged to be explained by this theory. Employés of the bank, who had imbibed the aristocratic spirit of the place, ventured to prophesy that it would be found one day that a dread of the discovery of his plebeian connections was his sole motive for his strange conduct. What was at first mere surmise, became at last an accepted fact ; insomuch that the head clerk of the country department, who was much respected in the bank, was sometimes known to remark in a whisper that a mantle of pride is sometimes convenient, especially if one's father happens to be a cheesemonger.

In truth, however, these sneerers had never in their secret hearts felt any faith in their dark suspicions. Their new companion's manner was not merely distant ; it was cold and disdainful. Even old Mr. Edmunds, whose venerated presence always imposed a respectful restraint upon the other clerks of the bank, received from him few marks of deference. The old man himself had observed this ; but the fact had not lessened his esteem for Carrell. ' He's a strange fellow,' he would say in his shrewd way to those whom he made confidants ; ' but he works hard, and I am not disposed to note small faults.' Edmunds even incurred the odious suspicion of being distantly related to his protégé by pro-

moting him with a rapidity which had never before been paralleled in the history of that old house of business. This fact made little change in the habits of the new comer; but his manner towards subordinates appeared harsh and unyielding. In fact, he only exacted from others the stern application to duties which he had made the law of his own life.

His misanthropic temper was not inborn. It was the final result of that tyranny and oppression, that hateful persecution, that life of disappointment and misery which he had endured so long. During his dismal imprisonment at Borley, these things had borne their bitter fruit. Life had to him no attraction save in the hope of rising from his degraded position to one in which he could indulge his hatred of the world that had been to him so cruel and unjust. The wrongs and the sufferings of others moved him little. Few things touched him except the signs of wealth and prosperity which met his eyes as he walked the streets, and filled him with a gnawing envy. He had little feeling for the poor, but the rich he hated; he had almost realised the fable of the man whose heart had withered, and who was incapable of generosity or compassion. He was ready, in the pursuit of his own advancement, to trample under foot

those who came in his way—to make them feel what he had felt ; to wreak a blind vengeance even upon those who had had no share in oppressing him. For in his mind there was no distinction. Every man's hand had been against him, until he had turned like a wild beast at bay.

On the day of his escape he had walked far in search of a lodging ; he had sought in vain for shelter. People eyed him askance, noted his dusty boots and travel-soiled appearance, and refused to let a furnished room to one who brought no visible property, and could refer to no one for character. So he had wandered on until chance had directed him to the secluded and miserable street in which Grindley had taken up his quarters. People are less fastidious in neighbourhoods of that kind, and here at last the wanderer had found rest.

To find employment was still more difficult. Day by day he went out on this wearisome errand. The newspapers had indicated to him persons wanting clerks, secretaries, amanuenses, and the like. As he had run his eyes down their long columns of such announcements, it seemed to him as if the demand for such services as he had to offer was boundless ; but he received the same answer from all. There were

many eager to enter their service who could show proficiency, who had had experience, who came recommended by persons of influence and position. Why should they reject them for one who had none of these things to offer? Why should they admit into their houses a man for whose character it appeared that nobody would vouch?

Carrell set all this to the account of the selfishness and cruelty of mankind; but in truth he was himself in great degree to blame for it. There were some at least who, moved by the energy of his appeal for a brief trial, had felt inclined to yield, and to give him that opportunity of proving his worth. But his manner was harsh and unpleasing. His language was abrupt, his tone almost angry. Timid men shrank from him; stronger minds were offended by an applicant for employment who asked for their favour as if he were demanding a right. His proud and imperious temper consorted ill with his humble position and appearance. Constant disappointment only increased these defects, till men began to meet him with harsher refusals. Thus his irritability increased, and the feelings which had stolen upon him in the dismal solitude of the guard-ward began to haunt him once more.

He ceased to go out by day; gave up the

struggle in despair ; paced to and fro in his room to ease his heart of bitter thoughts. At night he stole out for the same reason. He could find no relief but in that bodily exercise which was almost a necessity of his vigorous frame.

He walked among crowds, taking no heed of the life about him ; until one evening, when a voice behind him startled him with a warning of a danger that he had almost forgotten.

‘Been in the army, for a guinea,’ said the voice to a companion standing near him. ‘Notice his figure, and observe how he goes off with the left foot first.’

It was the voice of a man ; Carrell did not turn to look at him. He pulled his cap lower, and quickened his pace, until he had lost the sound of their footsteps in the distance. Was it indeed true that he carried about with him signs by which the idlest observer might read his history to betray him ?

Only a few nights later Grindley had watched him as has been described. Carrell’s quick ear had detected the fact that he was observed ; a glance had confirmed his suspicion. He did not recognise the man who had followed him, but hastened on as before, taking by-streets, and changing the direction of his footsteps from time

to time, until he appeared to have baffled his pursuer.

The suspicion that his secret was visible to all eyes, grew upon him until it became a mania. The very echo of his own footsteps took, in his imagination, the sound of pursuers at his heels. The looks of strangers as he passed them had something significant in them. Sometimes they seemed to regard him with an air of triumph—sometimes with a sly leer. He walked now with his cap always pulled low to conceal his face ; but this brought him little relief, for his ears were assailed with like delusions. Single words dropped by passers-by in conversation with others startled him with a fancied relevancy to that fatal secret which he carried with him ; even the murmur of conversation at a distance was converted by his fancy into fresh allusions to his soldier-like gait and bearing.

Nor was he more at ease in the retirement of his room. Solitude had become almost a habit with him ; but its depressing influence was not the less. He sat in the gathering twilight before his miserable fire brooding over these things until his room became haunted by uncouth figures which would have been invisible to all save him. At first he knew that these were the mere phantoms of a brain overwrought with

trouble such as few men had ever borne. He wrestled with them and strove to cast them off: recalled to mind stories of men who had suffered in like way, and who had dispelled their delusions by a like vigorous effort. But it was useless. Their horrible reality oppressed him. He grew to have even a faith in them. They multiplied in number, and became wilder in form and less like any earthly things that he had seen. They filled him with a terror that was as wild and unreal as themselves. They mocked at his misery, and seemed to whisper in his ears the fatal words, 'There is no escape but death.'

He was passing through a low fever which was favourable to delusions of this kind; but of this he knew nothing. An irresistible power seemed driving him onward to the fatal moment when he must perish by his own hand. By night and day, in his room or in the street, the same thought harassed him. The brightest day of that wintry time seemed shrouded in a funereal gloom. The light brought him no release from the shadows that hovered round him; the very air was heavy with the thought of death.

It was under the influence of this madness that he had made that determined attempt at self-destruction from which he had only been saved by Grindley's timely aid. He scarcely

thanked his benefactor for his service ; but the crisis was passed. The horrors of that night had awakened him to the realities of things ; the shock that he had sustained had helped him to shake off the phantoms that had impelled him to that mad act. Before the dawn of day he had recovered and grown calmer under the old man's care.

Whether because he knew that the wild delusions under which he had suffered had for awhile destroyed his reason, or because he had grown to be too callous for such a feeling, he looked back upon this period with scarcely any remorse. The time had passed at which religious influences had any power over his soul. A pride and self-reliance that had something in it diabolical possessed him. There is a degree of sorrow and misfortune which humbles the spirit, and renders it open to receive eternal truths ; but there are troubles which are too great for this end ; miseries which harden the heart ; sorrows which dry up the springs of compassion ; persecutions which convert their victims into persecutors. Carrell had reached this last stage of degradation.

His ingratitude to those who had helped him in his time of distress was but another phase of this diseased state of mind. He took their kind-

ness with a cynical disregard for their motives. To him it mattered little why Cousins had befriended him. He accepted his aid mechanically, as he would have availed himself of a floating spar if he had been drowning out at sea, without a thought of the causes which had cast it in his way. There was, perhaps, no man save Grindley for whom he had any kind of regard. The patience and the simplicity of the poor, despised, and miserable old man had touched him more than he knew himself. The man who had no pity for the sorrows of the world outside those miserable rooms could yet feel something like compassion for those failings which had brought with them so terrible a punishment. Carrell's moody fits seemed to lose half their terrors as the old man's footsteps sounded on their stairs. His attachment to Grindley kept alive one spark of humanity in his breast. It grew to be the only bond between him and that better nature he had once possessed.

Some revulsion of feeling was experienced among the employés at Barnardiston's when it was discovered that Philip Joyce had been recommended to the manager's notice by Lady Sommerton ; but Carrell's unpopularity was not diminished by this piece of information. Shortly after this an accident appeared to threaten the

immediate downfall of the new favourite. Old Mr. Edmunds, long the trusted manager and confidant of the firm, was taken ill and died. The other clerks wore crape for that melancholy event; but Carrell wore none. His ingratitude to a benefactor was the subject of remark; but he knew nothing of this. Wrapt in his impenetrable gloom and silence, the censorious tattle and unfriendly spirit of those about him failed to reach him; or if it did, passed unheeded. He courted no man's favour, and gave little thought to the question of how those with whom he came in contact were in the habit of regarding him.

The successor of Mr. Edmunds was a personal enemy of Carrell. Those to whom the latter had made himself so obnoxious rubbed their hands at this prospect of getting rid of their unpopular fellow-clerk. But their triumph was premature. By Mr. Edmunds' death, Arthur Gray had lost his right hand. He needed a secretary to assist him; and he selected the new clerk for that office.

'You'll sit in my room, Joyce,' he said. 'I have heard of you from poor Edmunds. Serve me as well as you served him, and I shall be content.'

His removal to Arthur Gray's private room, took him out of the sphere of these jealousies and hatreds. The clerks saw less of him now, and talked of him less. Meanwhile, the new secretary grew in favour with Gray, who liked him for his industry, and grave and silent manner. He seemed to have no eyes or ears save for the service of his new master. Gray trusted him in many things; but not with the momentous secrets which had disturbed the nightly rest of his old manager, and probably hastened his end. Those matters were now locked in his own breast; but Carrell heard and saw some things which he noted.

It was a period of speculative excitement; a time when new companies were hourly launched upon the market; and when no project seemed too wild to find support, or to float shares to be quoted at a premium. Moralists inveighed in vain against this public madness, grave authorities wasted their time in calculations, showing how the entire capital of the United Kingdom would be insufficient for carrying out these magnificent schemes. The rage, like a fever in the human body, seemed destined to run its course. Even the Claytersville Marine Residence Company, supported by the distinguished chairmanship of Lord Carew, had made a favour-

able début in the money-market. Everyone seemed happy—promoters, directors, shareholders, traffickers, brokers, and the newspapers, whose advertising columns were filled with prospectuses, which brought a shower of gold to their fortunate proprietors.

Arthur Gray's inner room was much frequented by ornamental directors and others, who were good authorities upon the subject of the prospects of these schemes, and the chances of speculations in the share market. They gossiped on these themes with the fashionable banker. The representative of the great house of Barnardiston's dared not take part in speculations of that kind, but Carrell heard of these opportunities for making wealth, these short and certain paths to fortune, with a bitter feeling. He had lived penuriously—in his dread of dependence he had denied himself even necessities, and had been content to lodge still in the miserable room in which Grindley had first found him. He had saved every shilling he could spare from his salary, but his hoard was still ridiculously small. With a moderate capital, he could have seen his way to fortune. Again and again he had found their golden prophecies fulfilled. He had the information which was essential to a speculator, but the opportunities were passing

away. 'It is not with a few pounds,' he reflected, 'that a fortune can be made.'

Nevertheless he found means of multiplying his small resources by a happy stroke. The larger sum increased his power. He risked his all and won again. Such a process is easy enough in times of speculative mania. All goes well ere the day of reckoning comes. But even here his new tide of fortune did not forsake him. When the final collapse arrived the ornamental directors were found still prophesying brighter things; but an instinctive fear of risk had seized upon Carrell. He had stopped short in time, and found himself already the master of eight hundred pounds.

He kept the secret of his sudden gains even from Grindley, and invested them in a safe and sober security, which left him nothing to fear from times of panic.

CHAPTER XVII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

READERS whose experiences of the world of fashion extend back to the period when those who have now attained to middle age were entering upon life, will remember the brief and brilliant reign of Laura Stapleton, the belle of three seasons, by which term she was long afterwards remembered by fops at the opera and the loungers of Rotten Row. Arthur Gray was but one of her long train of worshippers, and none had been more assiduous than he in courting her favour. Gossipers who thought themselves well-informed on all things in which fashionable circles take interest, could number on their fingers the men whom she most delighted to honour—could arrange them in their order of preference, and confidently affirm who was likely, who unlikely, finally to rob the firmament in which she shone of so conspicuous a star. But no one mentioned the head of Barnardiston's house with any serious faith in his pretensions. Indeed, he could hardly be said to have

any pretensions at all as far as such gossipers were informed, and yet no one of her admirers loved her with so wild a love. He was her accepted suitor. On his side this attachment grew stronger with that caution and concealment which he was compelled to practise. As to Laura Stapleton, if she did not love him it was certain that there was no man whom she preferred. So it had come to be understood between Mrs. Stapleton and Gray that her daughter was engaged to be married to the head of Barnardiston's house. The young lady who had refused the heir to an earldom consented to receive the addresses of the banker—even under the humiliating condition of that mysterious secrecy in their courtship which Gray had imposed.

‘It cannot be helped, dear,’ her mamma would say. ‘It is useless to deny that you have a reputation for extravagance. Arthur, you know, is in business, and must not be thought wild.’

Who were these Stapletons? was a question that had once been rife among the gossips referred to, but the mystery had been set at rest by the unexpected frankness of Mrs. Stapleton herself.

It was no less a person than the Honourable Mrs. Carew who had once made the mistake of asking this question in an audible whisper at an evening party, without remarking the fact that the young lady's mamma happened to be sitting near her.

Mrs. Stapleton leaned over the dos-à-dos on which she was sitting, and, tapping the questioner with her fan, said—

‘My dear Mrs. Carew, let me answer your enquiry. I am afraid you will think us very humble people. My husband, the late Mr. Grosvenor Stapleton, was a City merchant—like the present Lord Carew's great grandfather. My papa was a lieutenant in the navy, who died a young man, and left his children nothing but a good name.’

Mrs. Carew never forgave this attack. She pronounced it vulgar and coarse, and thenceforth rarely accepted an invitation without the preliminary enquiry, ‘Is that woman or her daughter to be there?’

But the gossips who were witnesses of this rencontre were delighted; they spread the report with many additions and improvements, tending to represent the discomfiture of the Honourable Mrs. Carew as still more triumphant and complete. The story did not diminish

the popularity of the mother or her daughter. A little humility sometimes adds a grace, and serves to blunt the malice of the envious. Liberal-minded people remarked that a City merchant after all might be a gentleman, and that a lieutenant in the navy, who died a young man, was not by any means a disgraceful ancestor.

Notwithstanding this, the fashionable world had been for a considerable time shy of recognising the Stapletons. They had burst upon them too suddenly to be received without suspicion. In her conversation with Cousins, Mrs. Stapleton had frankly acknowledged the view which the more experienced had taken of her daughter's position :—‘An adventuress trading, under the guidance of a wily mother, in her beauty and accomplishments.’ She had felt, indeed, a sort of triumph in alluding to it; for, thanks to her prudent management, a few short months had sufficed almost to ‘live down,’ as the phrase is, that wicked calumny. Few people now accused Laura Stapleton of any worse fault than that of being too extravagant a woman for a wise man's wife.

The causes of this revulsion in the feeling with which the Stapletons were regarded will

not be understood by the reader without a brief sketch of their history.

Mrs. Stapleton's account of herself and her family was strictly correct, as the gossips indeed were, by a little enquiry, soon able to ascertain. Her husband had been a Russia merchant; or, as an unfriendly recorder of the history of that family might have expressed it—a wholesale dealer in bristles. He had been moderately successful in his transactions in that article, and had retired and given up his little counting-house in Great Saint Helens some ten years before the period of this story. Ill-health was the chief cause of his early withdrawal from business, for his means were narrow. The money that he had made in his business scarcely exceeded ten thousand pounds. The revenue to be derived from such a sum was wholly inadequate to the maintenance of a respectable establishment in England. Doctors recommended the south of France. Mr. Stapleton—or rather his wife, for the control of the household was vested chiefly in that lady—availed herself of their suggestion. The Stapleton household quitted their native land, and took up their abode in Montpellier.

When the mother and daughter returned to England, the Stapletons were forgotten by their

former friends. Few of those who had been accustomed to visit them in their little house at Highgate, when Mr. Stapleton went to the City daily, and Laura was a child, recognised their old friends in the widow lady and her daughter of whom the world talked so much. A great change had come over them. Mrs. Stapleton was no longer the homely bristle-merchant's wife. She wore French fashions, and assumed the airs of a great lady. She took a house in Hertford Street—not the largest, but certainly the prettiest in that fashionable thoroughfare, a house painted white, with windows and balconies filled in the season with choice flowers. She brought with her letters of introduction, chiefly from old Legitimist families in Montpellier, who were poor enough, but whose names had a fine historical flavour about them. Yet she pushed her way very slowly, while there seemed a mystery about their origin and connections. The mother was not disheartened. She saw her course from the first, and never for a moment doubted of success.

In fact, the censorious people who had described her as trading in her daughter's beauty and accomplishments had not been in the slightest degree mistaken. The fortune which the City merchant had left was scarcely greater

than that with which he had retired, yet the style in which they lived was at least ten times more expensive than his. They kept horses and a groom, gave parties, opened their little drawing-room for fashionable concerts, rented a box at the opera in the best tier, and dressed and lived after the most costly models. 'Where does their money come from?' was a common enquiry among the loungers in the Row, who dropped their conversation for a moment to lean on the bar, and watch the fair Laura Stapleton go past on her sleek bay mare. But none knew. They little imagined that the intriguing mother was performing these miracles by the sole aid of the deceased merchant's ten thousand pounds, and the trifling savings which they had been able to add to that sum.

It is not difficult to calculate how long this magnificence could last. None knew better than Mrs. Stapleton herself; but she was a bold player. Already there were more than one suitor for her daughter's favour, a marriage with whom would have more than repaid the stake that she had ventured. Laura smiled graciously on all, but flirted with none, or at least abstained from flirtation when in the eye of the world. Young men gathered around her wherever she went, but not one could say that

she had encouraged addresses for the mere sake of conquest. She was too well schooled—the part that she played was too serious for that.

It was not Laura but her wily mother who had encouraged Lord Skelterdale to make love. Mrs. Stapleton had artfully led him to talk of her beauty, her goodness, her passion for music, for painting, and her other accomplishments, until the weak head of that silly young nobleman had become fired with an ambition to carry off so famous a young lady. ‘Ask her,’ said the mother, in answer to one of his most urgent appeals for her good offices. ‘For myself I will only say that I should be rejoiced at so honourable a union; but I really know nothing of my daughter’s feelings, and would not venture even to advise her in a matter which concerns her own happiness so closely.’

So poor Skelterdale finally made up his mind; plumped out, after much hesitation, the awful question, and received a refusal which was kindly and unaffected, but not to be mistaken. His lordship left her with a tear beneath his eye-glass; and went about praising her beauty and her generosity, and bewailing his misfortune in the ear of the world.

This was, in truth, what Mrs. Stapleton had expected. It was, indeed, the very thing which

she desired. The fact was that at this time Cousins had begun to feel some interest in her welfare; and had very fully informed her on the subject of his lordship's prospects. On the day before his interview with Laura, she had said to her daughter—

‘An offer from this young fop will be one of the best things that could happen for you; but mind, no love-making—no nonsense. A firm refusal is the only thing possible.’

The well-trained daughter had merely carried out the instructions of her guide, philosopher, and friend.

The success of Mrs. Stapleton's policy was complete. She had foreseen that until her daughter had refused what appeared to be an eligible offer the tattle of the curious would not be silenced. There could be no doubt about the fact—no possibility of setting down the rumour to the bragging of a designing mother. She was silent while Skelterdale himself proclaimed it to the world. On that unimpeachable authority, fashionable circles became informed of the circumstance that the supposed adventuress had actually refused the heir to an earldom. The Countess of Sommerton herself heard of this affair, and when she had recovered from the shock consequent upon the discovery,

was well pleased with the young lady's behaviour on the occasion ; but more particularly with that of her mother. She set the refusal down to that good taste which she had heard attributed to Mrs. Stapleton's daughter, and which had doubtless enabled the merchant's daughter to perceive that a marriage of that unequal kind is rarely productive of happiness on either side. But this was her private view of the matter. In public she treated the young lady with a marked favour, which was not without its uses in furthering Mrs. Stapleton's designs.

Colonel Hawker's offer was not so brilliant, but was not less useful as an evidence of the honourable position of the widow and her daughter. Hawker was a man of respectable fortune, there was really no objection to his suit in a pecuniary point of view. The colonel had never courted her : he expected to carry her by a respectful but brisk attack in military fashion ; but he too failed. The young lady was again brief and candid. There was no hesitation, no flirtation ; no display of pride in breaking hearts for pastime ; yet the colonel, when he left her, was perfectly convinced of the hopelessness of perseverance.

'Sir,' said Hawker to an intimate friend, 'the girl is honest and straightforward, and I've no

right to complain. It is the fortune of war. She couldn't love me, and there's an end of it.'

Mrs. Stapleton said nothing. She never bragged, and rarely gossiped about her daughter's prospects. She left others to talk upon these matters, which concerned her so closely. The truth was that Hawker's offer might have been accepted, but for her daughter's secret engagement with Arthur Gray, the great banker of St. James's Street, the living embodiment of the splendour of Barnardiston's, the sole inheritor of the wealth, and position, and influence of the chiefs of that great house.

The delay in the matter of the marriage of her daughter with Arthur Gray had been a slight embarrassment to Mrs. Stapleton. Her resources were becoming narrow; her little property, though not all dissipated, was not easily converted into cash without sacrifices. In this case, she had had resort to Cousins, who had helped her slightly in his speculative way. He knew well that Laura Stapleton's chances in the matrimonial market were in themselves as good a security as a man could hope for who looked for a profit of sixty per cent. He had advanced money on much less promising terms, and had found it, before now, a winning game. As to the affair with Gray, he dared not counsel

the mother to abandon it. A hint of the instability of Barnardiston's might have been as fatal to his own plans as to the bank itself. It would certainly have sufficed to cure Mrs. Stapleton of her passion for an alliance with a fashionable banker; but the step was too hazardous. Mrs. Stapleton had the ear of society, or at least of that more dangerous section of society which loves to talk and spread scandal. But, in truth, he saw no necessity for such a course. His power over Arthur Gray was complete. He did not doubt that he had dropped a folly of this kind; but if he did not he was sure of obtaining information on that subject, which would enable him finally to bring to bear upon him a pressure too great to be withstood.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Stapleton was as patient as her necessities would permit, for she had reasons for that temper of mind which appeared to her sufficient. She had privately consulted her lawyer as to the position of affairs, and had obtained from him some consoling assurances. Gray's courtship, in fact, had not been confined to one or two love-letters such as that which Cousins had seen, and which had appeared to that experienced man of the world of little importance themselves. He had made her a formal promise of marriage under his own hand. Mrs.

Stapleton had been advised that an action, supported by such evidence against a man in Gray's position, would in itself procure a fortune. But Arthur Gray's conduct, though strange, showed no sign of an intention to drive an injured widow and her daughter to that extremity. He was cautious as regarded the world; but his manner towards Laura was not less ardent, and his letters still breathed the strongest passion.

It was about this time that callers at the house in Hertford Street were one morning surprised to find the blinds down, and the flowers gone from balcony and verandah. The widow and her daughter were reported to be gone out of town for some weeks. It was in the height of the season. What could it mean? There were rumours of a secret marriage with Lord Skelterdale, and a wedding trip to Switzerland. But that young nobleman furnished a practical refutation of the story by driving through the streets of May Fair, and taking a fond look in person at the deserted house. Even Cousins knew nothing on the subject; but he felt in no way uneasy, except on one point. He bade Grindley direct his fellow-lodger to call on him in the morning, on his way to business.

Carrell went as appointed, and found Cousins in his room at that unusually early hour. His

patron conversed with him in a friendly way ; but in the course of their interview took occasion to question him as to whether Gray had been absent lately ; and whether he could be found at the banking-house at the same hour as usual, and other matters of that kind.

Carrell reflected on these questionings on his way to the bank. Did this man, for some purpose, expect him, in return for procuring him employment, to play the part of a spy on his employer's proceedings? There was something in his tone and manner which had for a moment suggested this idea ; but the questions were simple enough. They might indicate nothing but a desire to know at what time the banker might be seen ; and this view was confirmed by the fact that Cousins called on Gray a day or two later.

He had not come to seek information about Laura Stapleton ; for the facts of which Carrell had apprised him had satisfied him that Gray had no connection with her disappearance. In fact, the subject had already passed from his mind. His chief object was to observe the position of the new secretary in the banker's parlour, and to make use of such hints as might offer themselves of the relation of Philip Joyce with his new employer. Cousins satisfied himself that

the banker's secretary was in a fair way to be trusted to a degree which would render him an important auxiliary ; but the affair was not ripe yet.

‘I will give him time,’ he thought. ‘He will play his part better for not knowing more.’

So Cousins rested content for awhile, but his sagacity had failed him in this instance. The fact was that Gray was the only man in town who really knew the cause of the sudden disappearance of Laura and her mother. It was he who had suggested that they should withdraw from London for a time, and live in strict privacy in a cottage near Byfleet, in Surrey, which he himself had provided for them. It was a pretty little Swiss chalet, which he had purchased, with its small but delightful grounds. He had furnished it elegantly throughout for the habitation of two ladies ; and had laid out its lawns and gardens with the same perfect taste. When all was completed, and ready for their removal, he had presented it to Mrs. Stapleton, who had taken the gift as a fresh evidence of the sincerity of his wooing. Laura and she had removed there for awhile—‘heartily weary,’ as she assured him, ‘of the town and its pleasures, for which, after all,’ she added,

‘neither my daughter nor myself have any real inclination.’

Gray was delighted ; but he dared not visit them except on Sundays, until assured that Cousins’ suspicions were lulled. Then he stole down now and then by an evening train to Weybridge, and walked along the retired road to Byfleet, till he turned off through the woods, where he generally met Laura gathering specimens for her herbarium. Their cottage was situated on the border of the extensive range of wooded hills which lie between Byfleet and Cobham, a tract of country more secluded and picturesque, perhaps, than any other within many miles of London. The house itself might have been sought in vain by anyone who had not a very exact direction, for it was approached by a lonely by-road, or rather track, frequented by the wood-cutters’ carts which returned that way from the wooded mazes of Saint George’s Hill. Laura rode at times, but rarely went farther than Byfleet village or Wisley, where the beauty of Rotten Row was little likely at that season to be recognised. Gray’s evening visits were stealthy and brief. He returned by the late train to Vauxhall, and found his way home to Saint James’s Place in a common cab. Thus few persons noted his absence, or suspected that he

was the cause of the mysterious disappearance of which all the town now talked.

But he was compelled to absent himself from her whom he loved for many days at a time ; and the necessity for caution became greater. He had been observed by one who knew him at Weybridge Station. To be seen there often might attract attention, and lead to the discovery of the object of his visits. He knew well that if Cousins once became convinced of the extent of his infatuation, he would not hesitate to bring matters to a crisis, lest they should grow worse for his purpose. How he longed for a means of escape from his tyrannical influence. But except the tedious expectation of better times, there was only one.

It was a desperate step ; but the temptation was great. At first it had suggested itself to his mind only as a remote possibility — as a something on which the imagination, heated by dwelling on one absorbing theme, might linger for awhile and find a stealthy pleasure. By degrees it took more definite shape, until the thought filled every vacant moment of the day, and haunted him by night. In his possession were valuable securities deposited for safe keeping only—chiefly bonds for investments in foreign loans, made by the house of Barnardiston

at the request of clients, for whom the bank received the dividends. To raise money on these would be dangerous; to sell them would be equally fraudulent, but more easy. They could be disposed of in the open market without attracting observation. Even the owners themselves would be little likely to discover the fraud so long as an amount equal to the dividends thereon should be regularly placed to their accounts. Here was a mode of paying off Cousins, which promised a speedy relief from his oppression. For the rest he would trust to time, and his power in the future to restore the property he had thus appropriated.

Gray's case verified the ancient proverb. He did not become thus base by a sudden step. He brooded over the thought for many a day, now tempted sorely, now shrinking with horror from a crime which only a few years before his time had been regarded as deserving even of death.

His natural cheerfulness left him. He became absent and gloomy; shunned visitors, and absented himself longer than usual from the woman for whose sake he was thus drifting into sin. Carrell remarked the change one day; as he was about to leave the room, he was struck by hearing a faint groan. Looking back, he perceived that Gray was sitting at his table,

with his face covered with his hands in an attitude of deep despondency. His secretary watched him for a moment unobserved.

‘There are secrets in that breast,’ he thought, as he went out at the door, and closed it noiselessly behind him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE COTTAGE AT BYFLEET.

WHILE he continued to brood over his daring schemes for extricating himself from the power of Cousins, Arthur Gray's visits to the cottage at Byfleet became still less frequent. He grew pale and haggard. He deserted the clubs of which he had long been a constant frequenter; and, if seen riding, was rarely in company with any other person. The dinner-parties at which he had shone, knew him no more. The ordinary routine of his business became still more distasteful to him, and he walked to and fro between his house and the bank with slower steps. On the occasion of one of his visits, Mrs. Stapleton had noted the change in his appearance.

'You want rest,' she said. 'The affairs of the banking-house occupy you too constantly.'

Gray smiled faintly. 'I shall not be happy,' he said, 'till Laura and I are married. There have been obstacles in the way; but I am removing them fast.'

Mrs. Stapleton was satisfied with this explanation. Her sagacious mind enabled her to perceive that if his affection for her daughter had cooled, he would certainly have avoided a fresh allusion to their approaching union. But what could be the nature of the obstacles of which he had spoken? She meditated long on this question; but her meditations never led her to any approach to the true solution of that mystery. How, indeed, could she imagine that the head of Barnardiston's house could be troubled by embarrassments of the kind that visit ordinary men? She could think of no explanation but that of some troublesome liaison; some youthful folly which had involved him in obligations from which he found it hard to extricate himself without scandal. Such an affair was a matter of indifference to her as far as her daughter was concerned. 'One sees such things every day,' she reflected, 'but they are got over at last by arrangement. The world thinks none the worse of a young man of fashion for follies of this sort.' Still she was very curious. Who could this person be who had power enough to compel a great banker to postpone a marriage on which he had set his heart?

One afternoon the banker said to his secretary,

‘You can render me a service in a matter that requires discretion.’

Carrell bowed.

‘Here are a packet and a letter,’ he continued, ‘which I want placed in the hands of the lady to whom they are addressed. I know that I can trust you to be silent. Bring me her answer at my house to-night.’

Carrell glanced at the address, and read the words ‘Miss Stapleton, Fir Vale, near Byfleet.’

Gray gave him directions for finding the house.

‘Can you ride?’ he asked.

Carrell answered in the affirmative.

‘Get a horse, then, at Walton station,’ said Gray, ‘and ride over. It will attract less attention than if you went by Weybridge. It is a wild way through the woods, but you can hardly miss your path.’

Carrell went down by the train that afternoon; hired a horse at Walton, as directed, and rode away on this delicate mission. The important packet contained only a simple present; the letter was but a common love-letter. But poor Gray had received that morning a letter of reproaches which had cut him to the quick. He dared not go down that night; but he could not rest until he had obtained a reply from

Laura to his explanations, and forgiveness for his apparent neglect.

It wanted still an hour of sunset as Carrell opened a barred gate as directed, and took the bridle-path through the woods. The level rays of light shot through the green foliage, and made bright patches in the dusk beneath the trees. The path wound down into hollows, and rose again, half lost at times in the high fern; the birds sang out sweet, mellow notes, and waited for an answer deeper in the woods. Now and then a squirrel started from the brakes, ran up the stems of the fir-trees, and vanished in the branches overhead. Far away, in a deeper hollow, a little pool, half over-grown with waterlilies, reflected the cool sky. It was the first true summer's day of that year. But the solitary horseman had no eyes or ears for these things. He stopped once only, to listen for some sound of human life. Hearing none, he urged his horse with a blow from his heel, and pushing the light boughs aside impatiently when they struck him in the face, cantered easily upon the sandy soil.

He had journeyed more than a mile in this way, when a turn in the path revealed to him a lady on horseback just before him. Her horse was walking slowly, and as Carrell drew

nearer to her, she turned and looked him in the face. He caught her glance, but dropped his eyes and rode past her without speaking.

She was young and beautiful, and she sat in her saddle with an ease which might have struck the most casual observer ; but he noted none of these things. Her slight but graceful figure, revealed by her riding-habit of dark blue ; her abundant fair hair, of that light hue which is peculiar to wheat-straw before the summer sun has bronzed it ; the one long curl that escaped negligently from the mass, and fell upon her shoulder ; her clear blue eyes ; her white skin, just flushed a little with the summer heat and exercise, gave him no sensation of delight. But her presence there had startled him—thrilled him with a sort of dread—as if he had been visited again by one of those visions which sometimes in his lonely room had come before him beautiful and bright, only to change into those hideous forms which had driven him to despair. He listened for the sound of her horse's hoofs, but could not hear them. They fell silently upon the loose soil. After awhile he ventured to look back ; but the bridle-path still wound about, and she was no longer visible.

His mind was occupied with these wild

fancies as he rode on, until he came at last into a high road, which reminded him that he had forgotten Gray's instructions to take a path to the left. He felt an indescribable repugnance to going back by the path he had taken; but there was no other way, and he determined to retrace his steps. He saw no sign of the lady he had met in the wood, as he rode on at a slower pace, and finding the path Gray had indicated, soon came to the cottage.

The pathway passed the garden at the back of the house, which stood alone in a spot that had been cleared near the border of the wood. He made his way round to the front of the cottage; a space covered with short velvety turf opened out before him. A servant was near the gate of the cottage, leading a horse with a side-saddle. He recognised it as the horse of the lady he had seen in the woods.

A woman-servant answered his summons. The young lady, she said, had but just returned from a ride; and could not be seen at present. He directed her to say that he had a packet which must be placed in her hands.

Half an hour elapsed before the servant returned, and bade him follow her. She mounted the stairs before him, and throwing open a door, ushered him into a small but sumptuously

furnished room, in which sat the lady whom he sought. She rose from her chair, and took the packet with a smile.

‘You passed me in the wood,’ she said. ‘I am afraid you missed your way. Why did you not ask some one to direct you?’

‘I had instructions for finding the house, madam,’ he replied, ‘but I passed the path without observing it.’

As she was engaged in reading the letter his eyes fell upon her. She had divested herself of her riding-habit, and was attired for dinner in a simple dress of pale blue silk. The elegance and lightness of the room, which was furnished and decorated in the style of a lady’s boudoir; the trailing flowers that hung about the long window; the woods beyond; the presence of the fair lady who had disturbed his thoughts so suddenly, the retirement and the silence of the place, might have formed a dream of enchantment. But his imagination was busied only with that strange feeling of dread with which she had inspired him. It haunted him still. Her voice had for him a strange terror in it. The expression of her face seemed like that of one who looked into his soul curiously to read its secrets. It both attracted and repelled him. It was a relief when she finally dismissed

him, with a choice little note directed to Arthur Gray.

In the hall below he met Mrs. Stapleton, who was returning from a walk to Byfleet. She had learnt his business, and invited him into a dining-room, where she pressed him to take some refreshment after his journey ; but Carrell excused himself. He was anxious to be gone.

‘Are you a friend of Arthur’s?’ she inquired.

‘I am Mr. Gray’s secretary, madam,’ he replied.

‘I am afraid then,’ said the lady, ‘you have indeed but little time to bestow on us idle folks. We live a pleasant life here in this fine weather, and can hardly imagine the habits of busy people in town.’

Mrs. Stapleton surveyed her visitor carefully through her double eye-glass, and wondered to what extent so confidential a messenger was acquainted with the secrets of Arthur Gray’s life. ‘If he is trusted in this matter,’ she thought, ‘he is probably trusted elsewhere. Now if he would but stay, he might drop a hint which would enable me to inquire further.’

But her visitor’s firmness frustrated this scheme for trying to penetrate the secrets of the head of Barnardiston’s house. Time was pressing ; he had to get back to Walton, and

to take the train. Arthur Gray was anxious for the reply to his letter. It was impossible to stay longer.

Carrell rode back as he had come—through the woods. The sun had set; the bats were out; but the dusk came on slowly. The time was favourable to meditation; and his thoughts were occupied with Laura Stapleton and her relations with Gray long after he had gained the high road and the common leading to Walton station.

It was evident to him that there was a love affair between her and Gray; but what was the reason for so much secrecy? Why had Gray cautioned him not to make known the place of her retreat? Had these things any connection with that absent and dejected manner which he had observed in him? Did this woman, who had affected him so strangely—the tone of whose voice, silvery and soft as it was, had seemed to him to have something in it that warned the hearer to beware—did she exercise over the banker a power from which he could not escape, and yet would willingly be free?

A suspicion haunted his mind that the mysterious interrogation to which Cousins had subjected him had some relation to this affair. But why should Cousins be interested in the pro-

ceedings of Arthur Gray? What could the matrimonial projects of the Pall Mall banker have to do with Grindley's employer? It was difficult to imagine. Yet it was certain that Gray was compelled to resort to extraordinary stealth in the affair: and equally certain that Cousins was very anxious just then to be informed exactly upon his movements. These facts seemed to indicate some mystery which aroused his curiosity.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SIREN.

THE secret of the retreat of the Stapletons being once confided to Carrell, Arthur Gray did not scruple, a few days later, to despatch him again to Fir Vale. He had promised to visit Laura and her mother at the cottage that day; but his business had not progressed. He was ill at ease, and had a suspicion that his movements were watched by some one employed by Cousins. This was but the phantom of his own mind oppressed by a dread of the dangerous step for which he was preparing; but it sufficed to cause him uneasiness. He dared not go down to Byfleet that day. How he longed for the hour when he could release himself from the domination which prevented his seizing that happiness which was within his reach; but he was compelled to proceed cautiously.

A customer, on whose behalf he held a large amount in Swedish bonds, was about to leave England and take up his residence in Florence. He knew that when he was gone he would be

little likely to make any change in the disposition of his pecuniary affairs. He would, in the ordinary course of such things, leave these still in the hands of his bankers, to receive and remit the dividends which, by the original terms of the loan, were made payable in London. This was the particular security with which he judged it favourable to commence his operations; but he feared to make any movement while his customer still delayed, for he might have determined to convert these bonds into cash for some speculations abroad, or, if not, he might alter his mind at any moment without giving time to raise the money by some other means. His customer once out of England, Gray would feel more safe. The post moved slowly, a letter and reply would afford him full notice; and it would not be difficult, he thought, to raise the money if driven to it by converting other securities in his possession. So he lingered still; and Mrs. Stapleton and her daughter grew more and more surprised at a change in his habits which, but for his fervid protestations by letter, would seem to threaten the ultimate abandonment of the whole design of the marriage.

This delay was indeed serious to them, for more than one reason. Funds were failing them. They had gone to the end of their tether with

Cousins ; ominous signs of impatience in tradespeople, alarmed at their disappearance, were enclosed to them in letters by her trusty domestic Prescott in Hertford Street. A few hundreds, even, might have enabled them to hold out ; but without these it seemed difficult to pacify these creditors, whose example, if it became known, would inevitably bring down upon them other and more pressing claims.

Mrs. Stapleton and her daughter discussed these affairs more than once, in a spirit which would somewhat have surprised Arthur Gray if he could have listened to their conferences. Laura hated business, and all allusions to money matters ; but she had a mind for intrigue, and fell in with her mother's plans readily enough when she was convinced of their necessity. Of one thing they were determined. It would not be wise to make known their embarrassments to Gray. He was the last man to whom Mrs. Stapleton would have cared to give a hint of the fact that the splendour in which they had been living had been fictitious. It would not do to confess to the powerful banker of St. James's Street, who had condescended to ask the lovely Laura to accept his hand and fortune, that they had been all this time living upon capital in the hope of drawing a lucky prize in the lottery of

matrimony. He did not, indeed, think them rich. Mrs. Stapleton had more than once told him that her income would die with her, and that Laura had no fortune. He had professed himself indifferent to this, as a man in his position, deeply in love, might do; but to confess to him that his intended bride and her mother were beggars was too much even for the boldness of Laura Stapleton's mother.

The days hung heavily enough with them. Laura rode a little, painted a little, played a little, loitered in the gardens of the house, and wandered in the woods to collect specimens—for she was really an accomplished woman, and had cultivated a little science as an additional charm. Perhaps she could have spent a month in that beautiful solitude pleasantly enough, if there had been no pecuniary troubles to distress them. Her disappearance served at least to set the tongues of society talking about her, and promised to give an additional éclat to her presence when she returned to the scene of her old triumphs. But Gray's neglect had rendered their stay at Byfleet distasteful. Laura would gladly have returned if only to pique a lover who was so provokingly mysterious and so unaccountably remiss. But there were those creditors of whom they had received such

frequent advices, waiting anxiously to receive them. Their absence from town, which had drawn down their impatient applications, had been made the excuse for asking for further delay. 'All will be settled when my mistress returns,' was the constant reply of the trusty Prescott. The excuse was plausible, and for awhile it prevailed. Tradespeople who are honoured with the commands of dwellers in May Fair are reluctant to press for accounts while there is a possibility of offending important customers.

Such was the position of affairs at Fir Vale at the time of Carrell's second visit.

The mother and daughter had discussed anxiously the question of the causes of Gray's neglect that morning. When it was known to them that Laura's lover was not coming as he had promised, the mystery seemed to have deepened. Mrs. Stapleton determined to write herself a letter of remonstrance, but meanwhile she longed for an opportunity of interrogating the banker's secretary on this delicate subject. On the whole, it seemed to her that Laura would be more likely to succeed in this task than an older and less attractive lady, and the well-trained daughter fell easily into that view.

Just as there is a sort of costume which

may be worn in the country, but which could not on any account be displayed—in the season, at least—by well-bred persons in town, so there is a kind of manners which may be safely indulged in in rural solitudes, but which a young lady in Laura Stapleton's position in society would not think of venturing upon in Hyde Park or May Fair. In short, she determined to endeavour to win the favour of Arthur Gray's secretary by the power of her blue eyes, her soft laugh, and those other indescribable graces of the fascination of which she had had so many proofs.

The mother approved—indeed, Laura rarely took any step which had not the sanction of that lady.

‘The young man is handsome and intelligent,’ she reasoned. ‘If Gray should hear of this he will either repent of his neglect, or will quarrel with Laura.’ Either alternative seemed to her preferable to the suspense in which they lived, and which rendered their affairs every day more desperate.

When she had read Gray's epistle this time, Laura looked up from the paper, and said to Carrell—

‘I cannot write at present ; please say only that I am surprised.’

Carrell glanced at her involuntarily, and hesitated a moment.

‘Is it your wish that I should convey this message, madam?’ he asked.

Her reply came slowly, and as if she had struggled with herself and conquered some emotion.

‘Yes,’ she answered. ‘That is all.’

They were in the dining-room where Carrell had spoken with Mrs. Stapleton on the occasion of his last visit. Laura was attired, as when he had first seen her, in a riding-habit, the long train of which she held gracefully in one hand, while she tapped a chair gently with a whip in the other. Carrell bowed, and she returned his salutation. As he went out he saw a groom standing at the gate with one horse only, for in the country the young lady preferred to ride unattended.

Carrell rode away gently by the same path as before. He had not proceeded far before he heard the sound of a horse’s hoofs. It was close behind him, for the sandy soil had prevented his hearing it before.

‘You ride slowly this afternoon, Mr. Joyce,’ said a voice, which he recognised at once as that of Miss Stapleton.

Carrell drew up his horse to make way for

her. 'The train will not be due for two hours yet, madam,' he replied, 'and my beast evidently prefers to walk.'

'So I perceive,' she said, slackening her pace at the same time, until her horse walked beside his. 'I will make you a confession. I am glad to have overtaken you. I gave you a harsh message for Arthur just now—' She faltered, for Carrell had turned, and looked towards her curiously. As her eyes met his, she dropped them in a sweet confusion. Then she rode on without speaking for a short distance.

She was the first to break the silence. 'Mr. Joyce,' she said, as she patted and smoothed the neck of the graceful animal which bore her, 'you are trusted with the secret of my engagement to Mr. Gray. I can speak frankly to you. The fact is, I would gladly soften the harshness of the message that I gave you if I could only be sure that Arthur deserved it; but he leaves us here in this solitary place, and—and——'

She hesitated, and in her embarrassment, dropped her whip. Carrell dismounted to pick it up for her. She received it with a gracious smile. Perhaps the beauty, whose part in society had been only to be flattered and caressed, had never looked so interesting as while thus almost confessing to an unrequited affection.

‘In short,’ she continued, ‘I fear that Arthur loves me no longer as he did. But I forget. Pray forgive me. I am foolish, I know, to talk of these things.’

She knew well that the young loungers who had gathered around her at the soirées in Hertford Street would have lost their heads under this kind of attack, and she felt confident of being able soon to convert the banker’s secretary into a devoted servant; but his manner was cold and reserved. He answered her only with polite acknowledgments, and she determined for the present to shift her tactics.

‘I must take a little time to consider my answer, Mr. Joyce,’ she said. ‘I hope your horse will not object to climb Saint George’s Hill. It is not far from the direct way, and the ride is magnificent. You have time, you know. In a little while I shall collect my thoughts. I was vexed just now, but it is passing. A message should not be sent in anger.’

He replied by formal assurances that his time was abundant, and that he was at her service.

The path they were taking led them through scenes of rare sylvan beauty, which until a few years since were little frequented except by enthusiastic lovers of the picturesque. It was wilder even than the by-road through the woods

by which he had travelled on the occasion of his first visit. The fir-trees were of a nobler growth—the oaks and Spanish chestnuts in the hollows spread their huge branches wide, and cast a broader shade. The path rose and dipped again into a little valley, where there was a rushy brook ; then ascended steeply till they emerged upon an open space, surrounded by high firs upon the summit of the hill.

‘This is the very heart of the woods,’ said Laura as she reined in her horse to contemplate the scene through a break in the trees. ‘It is said that there is no view so fine in the whole county ; but men of business, I know, care little for these things, and yet one might be happy in this part—at least, with a mind free to enjoy the beauty of the place.’ At this she sighed—very gently, almost inaudibly, in fact, and cast her eyes downward—those beautiful blue eyes of which so many had felt the influence.

‘It is true, madam,’ replied her companion, ‘that there are conditions of the mind in which these things have little charm.’

‘Ah, Mr. Joyce,’ said the young lady, ‘you who give your minds to money and affairs, and are occupied all day with business, have no time for such gloomy thoughts. It is in solitude

that one broods over things that disturb the mind. It is only in the dull round of a woman's life that sorrows become real.'

'Rather say that the mind of those who are unoccupied creates its own miseries.'

'Are there no true sorrows, then?'

'Yes, indeed, some; but they rarely touch the rich and powerful.'

'What are they in your judgment?'

'Loss of liberty, subjection to the will of tyrants, poverty and dependence, and the like. What else need man or woman fear?'

There was an energy—almost a passionate fierceness in the tone with which he pronounced the latter question, which startled her.

'A narrow view of life,' she said. 'Consider. Is human misery, indeed, all summed up in this? Are the disappointments of friendship nothing? Is it nothing to have loved, and then to know that those in whom our happiness is centred have become indifferent, cold, neglectful? Forgive me, I have said more than I intended to you, sir, who are almost a stranger. You will think I am harping on my own troubles.'

There were few men with whom Laura Stapleton had been accustomed to hold converse, who could have withstood this dangerous kind of confidence; but Carrell answered coldly—

‘I see nothing in your questions but the delusions with which those who are fortunate enough to have no real troubles are pleased to torment themselves.’

Laura sighed again. ‘Ah,’ she said, ‘this illustrates my notion of how hard it is for men to enter into the woman’s view of life. Let us go.’

They took the path on the other side of the hill, and slowly descended. Laura continued to talk for some time in her artless way. It was near sunset as they reached the end of the woods.

‘We part here, Mr. Joyce,’ she said, ‘or you will miss your train; I shall ride back quickly by the road. I had almost forgotten my message to Mr. Gray. On reflection, I do not think I can convey my meaning by word of mouth. I will write to him. Good-day.’

‘Good-day, madam,’ answered Carrell, as he rose in the stirrups and bowed. Her horse cantered away with her under the green boughs which overshadowed the roadway. She looked back cautiously once to see if she was observed, but her late companion was walking his horse gently, with his face turned towards his destination.

Had she made progress? Was the banker’s secretary about to fall into her trap? Would

he be her friend even at the expense of his employer's interest? How could she doubt it? For when had Laura Stapleton ever failed to dazzle, with far less pains than she had expended upon this man, so inferior to herself in position? And yet she felt uneasy, as if for the first time she had missed that power in which she felt all a woman's pride. The suspicion piqued her. She had humbled herself almost so far as to confess herself despised and neglected by a man whom she loved. She, whom the whole world of fashion had seemed to seek after, had suddenly descended to play the part of Calypso in the island. It was a farce that made her blood tingle as she mused upon it.

'This cannot last long,' she thought. 'If I cannot learn the cause of his neglect, I will return to town at all hazards. Hawker shall call him to account, and the world shall know the story of our disappearance.'

She was really angry—angry with Arthur Gray, angry with herself; but her mind still returned to her cherished object of adding the poor secretary of her lover to the list of her conquests.

Meanwhile, Carrell knew nothing of the toils which the cunning Laura was endeavouring to weave around him. Her conversation during

their ride had struck him only as the gossip of an idle woman filled with the thought of her own love affair, and impatient at every fancied neglect. He had scarcely recovered yet from that instinctive dread of her presence which had seized him so strangely on their first encounter.

Laura Stapleton little imagined how hard a task she had set herself; but time and perseverance will effect marvels. It was a luxury for an acknowledged beauty to be able to exercise that power of fascinating by a direct flirtation which in town she had so long been compelled to forego. She determined that it should not be her fault if Philip Joyce did not break his heart with a hopeless passion.

And fate, conspiring, as it might have seemed, to favour these plans, did not fail to procure her abundant opportunities of trying the effect of her arts. Carrell passed frequently between Saint James's Street and Fir Vale. There was no other person whom Gray dared trust. The lovers were in the midst of a correspondence full of reproaches and explanations, which required, or seemed to require, much fleetier messengers than the post could provide. Carrell bore these tender effusions, and sometimes was entrusted with the more delicate task of

assuring her by word of mouth of more things than Gray, oppressed by his embarrassed affairs, could find time to write. It was not likely to occur to the great banker that he might one day find in his dependent a rival in his love.

Laura Stapleton became accustomed to trust more and more to Carrell the story of her troubles and her doubts of her lover's good faith. It is at all times a dangerous thing for women to confide secrets of this kind to the other sex. The spectacle of a beautiful girl in tears at the neglect of a lover who is insensible to her attractions, might have moved a mind less occupied with thoughts of worldly advancement than the banker's secretary. Even his selfish nature was touched at last. They walked often in the garden together talking of these things. More than once they met as before in those woodland byways where she was fond of riding alone.

One day they were riding side by side in this way, when the proud beauty, who had so often looked with indifference on the pain she had caused, burst into a flood of passionate tears, and exclaimed—

‘I can never love him again. I despise him—hate him, for he has betrayed me. You know well that his heart is another's; but I

have no friend in the world who will tell me truth.'

It was partly a real feeling of humiliation at the part which her prudent mother still prevailed on her to play for the sake of the rich prize in view; partly annoyance at her failure to extort from Carrell the information about which she was so curious.

Carrell protested that he knew nothing which was important to her to know and which he had not told her. His tone was earnest, and she believed him. It was the first time that her apparent distress had moved him.

'Can I trust you?' she asked.

'I will serve you if I can,' he replied.

'Say nothing of this,' she added; 'but observe for me. Let me know the secret of this strange conduct on the part of Mr. Gray, and be sure of my gratitude.'

He felt no shame in being thus called upon to play the spy. His sense of honour was almost dead. He promised to comply. In truth he had already entered upon that degrading task. Thenceforward he watched Gray constantly; observed him by day; noted what papers he pored over; watched him by night. So by degrees he made discoveries, though not of the kind which Laura Stapleton expected.

CHAPTER XX.

WATCHED.

ARTHUR GRAY's belief that he was watched when he walked the streets had been at first the mere fancy of a mind overburdened with thoughts which it dared not utter aloud. It soon came to have a more substantial foundation.


More than once in the evening time he had left his home on certain important affairs, and had observed a strange, grotesque figure stealing along in the distance behind him, in a way that no man adopts who is engaged on honest business. The stranger was a little old man in black, who walked with a stoop, either from habit or for the sake of escaping recognition. He came along generally close to the walls of houses on the opposite side of the way. Sometimes he lingered and looked back, as if to divert attention from his purpose; at other times he would stop to gaze in a shop window, or read a placard upon a wall. Generally he kept so far behind that it was difficult to detect his figure in a street in which there were many passers-by. If

Gray's suspicions had not been awakened by his previous fancies, it is probable that the stranger would have escaped his notice; but his habit of looking behind, and scanning eagerly the appearance of persons approaching him, soon disclosed to him the fact that this man, though always far off, invariably took the same route as himself. He was certainly not the sort of person whom most people would have chosen for a spy. He was, to begin with, an old man, necessarily wanting in the activity and the readiness which are required for that kind of business. His appearance, too, was peculiar, and could not fail to strike anyone who had reason to suspect that his foot-steps would be dogged. Gray had a suspicion that he had seen him somewhere before, but the distance at which he kept prevented his being sure.

It seemed to him that this strange figure was only on the watch at evening time. Gray rarely left the banking-house during the day; but when he did he generally failed to detect his mysterious watcher. Suspicion, however had with him become almost a disease of the mind, and even in the daytime he walked with an uneasy sense of being observed in all his movements. It was possible that the work of spying was divided, and that some one watched him

by day who was less conspicuous in appearance or more skilful in concealing himself than the little old man, whose queer form he had so often detected. A similarity in dress or other points of external appearance in persons who were walking behind him at different times was sufficient to harass him with doubts and fears. If he called a cab—for he rarely drove his own cabriolet at this time—there seemed to his fancy to be always the same sound of wheels behind him. Go where he would, by night or day, this notion pursued him. He dared not proceed with the desperate business he had in hand: he hesitated and lingered; devised plans less dangerous for raising money for present needs, and for a while postponed the fatal step.

Who could be the cause of this watching but Cousins? No other person was aware of the desperate position of affairs. No one but Cousins could have any motive, as far as he knew, for spying his movements. It was evident, he thought, that Cousins, alarmed for the safety of his advances, and for his prospect of winning those exorbitant profits which he had hoped to make out of the difficulties of the banking-house, had resorted to this vile means of obtaining information. Gray's hope was that a short time would



serve to weary him of this course. As yet, he could have discovered nothing. On the very evening when the banker had first become convinced that the little old man was watching him, he had been on his way to visit a broker who was a private friend of his, and whom he relied on for converting the Swedish bonds. He had even approached the door of the broker's house, when he prudently determined to postpone his intention.

On another occasion he had paid a visit to Frere of Wellclose Square, and on leaving the house of that well-known lawyer and money-lender in the dusk of the evening, had observed the same mysterious figure of the old man, who appeared to devote his evenings to observing him. Gray's business with Frere, though private, had nothing in it of a dishonourable character. During a period of speculative excitement, some years before Gray's succession to the business, the house of Barnardiston and Company had advanced comparatively small sums to a speculative firm of builders, who carried on their operations in the extreme far west of Notting Hill. As not unfrequently happens, Barnardiston and Company had found it easier to embark in this kind of business than to withdraw from it afterwards. Then came the usual reaction ; a time

of panic; an outcry against the Bank Charter; a rush for discounts. The speculative builders saw old Mr. Challoner one morning in the bank-parlour in Saint James's Street, and communicated to him the unpleasant intelligence that without further support they must stop payment; a step which would bring before the public the unpleasant revelation that Barnardiston and Company, beguiled by the persuasions of an aristocratic ground landlord, had invested money in contravention of the rules of sound banking. There was no course but to comply. Thus, in the progress of time the bank had come to hold second and third mortgages upon rather doubtful house property, including some considerable rows of carcasses little likely to be finished for a generation or so. This was the security which it had occurred to Gray to transfer upon an arrangement to Frere, whose business fortunately lay out of the range of Saint James's Street and May Fair. There was no urgent necessity for concealing a transaction of this kind. Gray explained to Frere that the house had come into possession of these securities some years before, and that he was anxious to transfer them only because they were out of the ordinary course of a banker's business. In a time of panic such a transaction might have got

wind to the injury of the house ; but commercial tranquillity was now restored, and there was little danger of anyone observing it.

Nevertheless, it alarmed him to find that his pursuer, whoever he might be, had tracked him here. As his cab issued out of the old-fashioned gateway, Gray had distinctly seen the old man hanging about near the railing of the square. How he could have tracked him there he knew not. He had looked back more than once on his way thither, but had observed nothing.

Subsequently, the banker received a still more alarming proof of the perseverance of the man who thus tracked his movements in the evening time. It was on the occasion of one of those visits to Byfleet, now become so rare. He had this time employed more than usual precaution. 'If I ride,' he thought, 'this man can only follow me by riding too.' Accordingly, he had taken a cab in a street where there was no other vehicle. His pursuer seemed on this occasion to have ceased from his functions. Gray looked far and wide, and detecting no trace of him, ordered the driver to go to Vauxhall Station ; but he had not proceeded far before the old notion possessed him that there was some one following him in another vehicle. Nor could there be any doubt this time of the correctness

of his suspicions. As the banker descended from his cab, he distinctly saw another cab draw up at a distance, and a man issue from it, who paid the driver, and slunk away. It was, beyond question, the little old man in black.

Gray hesitated. If this man could but discover for what place he took a ticket, the secret of his visits to Byfleet might soon be known. But delay and disappointment had rendered him desperate. He took his ticket and lingered about for a time ; but his pursuer did not appear, and he was satisfied at least that he did not travel by the same train. Yet this fact made him more uneasy, and rendered his visits to Byfleet still rarer.

CHAPTER XXI.

DOUBLE DEALING.

SHORTLY after this an accident furnished Gray with something like proof that the man who watched him was employed by Cousins. It happened one morning that as the banker was crossing Saint James's Street on his way to business, he was struck by the appearance of a little old man in black, who seemed to bear a close resemblance to the man whose curiosity about the banker's proceedings in the evening time was so insatiable. A closer inspection satisfied him that it was the same. But the spy was evidently not on duty now. It appeared, indeed, pretty certain that he was not aware of Gray's presence, for he hurried onward without looking back, and passed in and out of the crowd of passers-by as if bent on some business and pressed for time. Gray followed him cautiously for awhile. Their parts were now changed; the watched became the watcher. But this kind of business was too hazardous to be pursued long. The unfortunate banker was

haunted at all times by the fear of being observed. It was possible that there was some other watcher at work, who might detect him in the act of following the old man. This suspicion alone would have compelled him to abandon his purpose ; but at that moment the idea of a new expedient struck him. He was passing the entrance to a club-house near Charing Cross, where a ticket-porter sat waiting for hire upon a stool beside the door. Gray stopped and spoke to the man.

‘There’s a little old man dressed in black yonder,’ he said.

The ticket-porter looked in the direction in which the speaker pointed.

‘The old man in the dress coat ?’ he enquired.

‘The same,’ replied Gray. ‘Here is half-a-crown. See where he goes ; ascertain his name if you can. You will be here to-morrow morning at this hour ?’

The porter nodded.

‘Make haste. If you succeed there will be half-a-guinea for your pains.’

The porter took the half-crown and hurried away, inspired by the prospect of a profitable job.

The old man pursued his way along the Strand and through Temple Bar, evidently un-

conscious that it was now his turn to be observed. He had not proceeded much farther before it began to be evident that he was in some way connected with the legal profession. The clock of Saint Dunstan's was striking twelve as he paused and drew from his tail pocket a small bundle of papers tied with red tape. From these he selected one, and passing up a narrow passage, entered one of the Inns of Court. The porter followed him until he arrived at a stone building, bearing the inscription, 'Judge's Chambers.' The building was approached by a flight of steps leading to folding-doors, which opened into a large hall, where a crowd of persons were shouting out the names of well-known firms of solicitors. It was evidently a place of meeting for attorneys and their clerks, who had some business to transact together, for every now and then a voice would answer to a name called.

The porter followed close beside the old man until some one shouted forth—

'Mr. Samuel Grindley.'

'Here,' cried the little old man, as he made a way through the crowd. 'Who called Grindley?'

'I did,' said a thin, shabby-looking youth, holding a bundle of papers identical in appearance with that which the old man had taken

from his pocket. 'I'm for the defendant in Cousins versus Clayter. Give us a week to plead, or I must go before the judge.'

The porter heard no more. He was a practical man, and having fulfilled the conditions on which he had been promised his reward, he departed. But he had not gone far when some evil influence suggested to him a piece of roguery of a peculiar and ingenious character. He was in this affair, at present, the servant of one party only—what if he could make himself the servant of the other too, and contrive to be paid by both? Sudden good fortune is corrupting; the appetite for money grows by what it feeds on. The porter was miserably poor. He had a family of children, as poor men generally have. The temptation was strong, and sophisms were not wanting to soothe his conscience. How did he know that the gentleman who had thus set him to play the spy did not intend to make some base use of his information? To warn the old man of this suspicious circumstance might be at least as useful a step as that of conveying secret intelligence of his movements to another for a bribe. Determined by these considerations, he retraced his steps.

The man of whom he was in quest was standing on the steps of the building as the porter

arrived there again. He was tying his bundle of papers as if preparing to go. The porter stopped in front of him and touched his hat.

‘Mr. Samuel Grindley?’ he enquired.

‘That’s my name. What is it?’

‘I’ve something private and important to tell you. Let us find a quiet corner.’

The old man looked down at the speaker in a nervous hurried way, which satisfied the porter that he was not easy in his conscience.

‘A quiet corner,’ he repeated, as he fumbled ineffectually with the piece of red tape; ‘and private business? Who can have private business with me in the City at this hour?’ and his hand shook visibly.

‘I can,’ replied the porter, emboldened, by the old man’s weakness, to take the lead in the matter. ‘Come up here.’

Grindley followed him helplessly till they came to a retired nook, where the shade of two sickly trees made the privacy still more attractive.

‘Do you know anybody who would be likely to watch you?’ asked the porter.

The question seemed to affect the old man strangely. He trembled and looked about him like one who fears that he has fallen into some ambush.

‘To watch me?’ he stammered. ‘No, no one. There’s some mistake.’

‘I beg your pardon; no mistake at all. There’s a gentleman who employs me who is very curious to learn your name and where you go to. You see, I’ve found out both.’

‘Dear me,’ faltered the old man. ‘He has no right to know. Don’t tell him anything. Or, say Jones.’

‘Agreed,’ said the porter, ‘if you’ll make it worth my while. How much, now, is it worth to describe you as a gentleman by the name of Jones, who goes at twelve o’clock every day, say to the Royal Exchange?’

‘A trifle,’ replied the old man. ‘That is, as much as I’ve got here. It’s very little,’ he added, as he opened a leathern purse, and took out some very small coins.

‘Little won’t do,’ said the porter. ‘The other gentleman gave half-a-crown, and promised half-a-guinea besides. You ought to pay double at least.’

‘Was it a tall gentleman?’ asked the old man, hesitating.

‘Yes.’

‘A military-looking man?’

‘Yes; wore a moustache.’

‘I think I know,’ said the old man musingly.

‘You shall have the sum you name, but not now. I’ve nothing to speak of about me.’

‘You must settle to-night,’ urged the porter. ‘I shall see the gentleman to-morrow at half-past eleven.’

‘Meet me at eight this evening, then,’ said the wretched Grindley, ‘and I’ll bring the money.’

‘Where?’

‘Anywhere in the West. Say Cavendish Square.’

‘Agreed,’ said the porter, and they parted.

‘A queer old fellow,’ muttered the porter, as he looked after him; ‘but his money will be worth earning.’

On the whole, the cunning porter determined that it would be best to keep faith with Grindley, and deceive his first employer. He had begun to be alarmed at the boldness of his own designs, ‘but the name of Jones,’ he reasoned, ‘reveals nothing, and the matter will be dropped.’

The next morning, however, found him in a different frame of mind. The old man had failed to keep his appointment. From the hour of eight until long after the church clocks had sounded nine, the porter had perambulated the railings of Cavendish Square without discovering

any trace of the little old man in black. The fact was that since they had parted Grindley had taken counsel with one in whom he implicitly trusted, and had in consequence absented himself from Cavendish Square. This mean, not to say treacherous conduct, irritated the porter. He had wasted his time, he had lost the prospect of a considerable reward on which he had depended, he had been fooled and outwitted by a weak old man. Gray found him at a little before noon the next day seated in his accustomed chair, and in no mood to conceal anything which might turn to the disadvantage of the old man in black. He communicated to his employer what he knew, together with some unflattering remarks upon Mr. Grindley's furtive way, and general hang-dog expression.

Gray had a strong impression that he had somewhere heard before the name of Samuel Grindley. The fact that he was an attorney soon helped him to more definite information. He walked into a stationer's shop near Charing Cross, where he asked to be permitted to refer to a little volume bound in red leather, and known to the legal profession as the 'Law List.' Here, under letter G, he quickly found the name in which he was in search, and discovered the significant fact that Mr. Samuel Grindley's

offices were in the house in which Cousins carried on business in May Fair.

Gray had for obvious reasons refrained from visiting Cousins, with whom he had transacted all business personally, and generally at the banking-house; but he remembered having heard of an old man who had taken chambers of Cousins, and had become his legal adviser. He even remembered, now, having once received a packet from Cousins by the hands of a man who bore a strong resemblance to the little lawyer.

Gray no longer felt any doubt that it was Cousins who had set the old man to watch him; but from that day he missed the familiar figure of the spy. He looked behind again and again in his walks at evening time; laid traps to detect him, lingered in short thoroughfares to give him time to overtake him. He soon came to the conclusion that for some reason the little lawyer had ceased to watch him. Had Cousins desisted, baffled by repeated failure to make any discovery of importance, or had he simply found another agent more wary? It seemed strange that the old man had ceased to watch on the very day when Gray had discovered his name. This

circumstance alone disquieted him, almost as much as the knowledge of Grindley's espionage. He was troubled now by a vague dread of some scrutiny which he could not fathom; some eye ever on the watch, from which there could be no escape.

CHAPTER XXII.

DISCOVERIES.

SCARCELY a fortnight had elapsed since Carrell's promise to Laura Stapleton when he began to make those discoveries already mentioned, and which were of far greater importance than any which her jealous anger had anticipated.

Arthur Gray, overwhelmed with business which he was compelled by the death of his trusted manager to transact personally, distracted by the obstacles in the way of his marriage, and harassed and alarmed by the fear of spies, had grown careless in some matters in which he had hitherto been cautious and prudent. He was, moreover, compelled to confide to his secretary books and papers in which it was necessary to make entries and calculations of a kind which could only be safely entrusted to one whose suspicions were asleep. These documents disclosed to Carrell facts which set him thinking. By degrees these facts began to take shape, and throw light on each other. Certain papers that he pored over thus became significant.

In some letters darkly referring to money transactions, and bearing for signature only the words 'Your old friend,' he had detected the handwriting of that paper of instructions which Cousins had sent to him by Grindley; and he had satisfied himself from these that Gray was under secret and heavy obligations to that notorious money-lender, the peculiar nature of whose business Grindley had revealed to him. Here, then, seemed to be the key to that dreamy and abstracted manner, those fits of gloom and depression, by which Arthur Gray was so often visited. The significance of these things could not be mistaken. The bank was involved, and Cousins was in some way interested in its affairs.

He felt a pleasure in speculating upon these mysterious signs, and resolved to watch them further. They promised to lead him to knowledge that might be valuable, for if it was of importance to Cousins to know Gray's movements, why might it not be to him? It was something to be the confidant of a man like Gray—the possessor of secrets which he dared not confide to the world. The evil spirit that had taken possession of his nature prompted him to treasure up these things, in the hope that they might serve his schemes of advancement. He had descended so low that he could look

forward with satisfaction to the time when he could make them the basis of a claim to Gray's influence in raising him from the dreary bondage of his labours in the banking-house. 'Men have treated me as a football long enough,' he murmured. 'It is time that I made them serve my ends.' The daily spectacle of the banker's power and position had consumed his heart with a secret envy. Why should this man be endowed with wealth and influence when he had none? Why should a poor man respect the accidents of fortune more than there was need? If chance gave him power, was it not as legitimate to use it as it was for this proud banker to avail himself of the riches and the social station for which he had done nothing? Such were the sophisms with which he drugged his soul.

One day Carrell observed him take some papers from a tin box in a fireproof closet. The tin box was labelled with the name of a customer of the bank who had lately retired to Italy. These papers Gray placed in his pocket, after which he relocked the box, and closed the door of the closet again. That afternoon Gray was tracked by the little man in black to the door of a well-known broker who had sold for Carrell some of those shares in speculative companies in which he had invested so

profitably. The banker's conduct was strange : he lingered at the door, but did not enter ; he looked about him cautiously, and finally retraced his footsteps and returned home. It must have been evident to anyone who had observed him that afternoon, that he was bent on some business which he shrank from accomplishing. Carrell learnt these facts that night. In truth, the old man whom the banker had so confidently assumed to be a spy in the interest of Cousins, had been employed by Carrell in fulfilment of his promise to Laura Stapleton.

A reference to the account of the customer whose name was painted on the tin box enabled the banker's secretary at once to determine that since his departure to take up his residence in Italy, the bank had had no transactions with him, save in connection with the receipt and transmission of dividends upon certain Swedish bonds. Carrell had become crafty as well as unscrupulous. 'When next that box is opened,' he thought, 'the bonds will have melted, and this great banker will have started on a road which leads to the hulks.'

When Grindley apprised Carrell of how Gray had observed him, and had finally adopted a ruse by which he had discovered his name, he counselled the old man to abstain from further

watching, and by no means to keep his appointment with the porter in Cavendish Square. He knew well that Gray must discover Grindley's connection with Cousins, and that he would therefore set down his watching to the craft of that unscrupulous gentleman. But to pursue the system of watching him any further, would have been hazardous and useless. Grindley's pains had indeed been fruitless as far as regarded the original purpose. He had discovered nothing which could interest Laura Stapleton, except Gray's pecuniary embarrassments, which he had no intention to betray.

Grindley readily obeyed Carrell's injunctions. He had learnt, indeed, to follow his neighbour's wishes with the fidelity of a dog to its master. Carrell's rapid rise in the banking-house, his power and resources, were the never-failing cause of the old man's wonderment and admiration. He regarded him with a sort of hero-worship, which was childish in its extravagance. He imbibed Carrell's cynical views of life, or thought that he imbibed them; for, in truth, the old man followed almost blindly the dictates of his companion's temper. The man whom he had been so strangely permitted to save from destruction became his strength and support both

for evil and for good. He had scarcely any existence beyond the influence of that strong will. Even the baseness of his fallen nature, the harshness, the cruelty, and the selfishness which Carrell openly betrayed, had something in them dazzling and attractive in the old man's eyes. He took his hero as he found him, and scarcely wished him otherwise. There was a courage and a consciousness of power in all his dealings with the world, which fascinated the old man by their contrast with his own weak, vacillating nature. The ill usage which he endured at Cousins' hands became easier to bear from the secret sense of Carrell's protection. His miserable home had grown bright. Life was no longer a burden, nor the future hopeless.

They still inhabited the two garrets. Carrell had determined to remain there, partly from his love of privacy, and partly in consequence of those penurious habits which he had acquired from his dread of falling again into dependence. But he would often delight the old man by pictures of future prosperity such as he had scarcely dared to picture even in his old day dreams.

'This is a world of knaves, Grindley,' he would say. 'The problem is how to make them serve our ends.'

At length Grindley's disappearance embold-

ened Arthur Gray to take the first step which he had so long contemplated for releasing himself from the grasp of Cousins. He opened the box again, took from it the necessary securities, and repaired to the brokers. The transaction was soon completed. No power of attorney was necessary ; the bonds being nominally the property of Barnardiston and Company, as trustees for their client. Gray had divulged this step to no one. No record of it remained save in his own breast. His client was now settled in Florence. The fraud seemed so simple and easy, the relief which it promised so great, that he almost wondered why he had hesitated. There were other securities of a like nature, the sale of which would not be more likely to lead to enquiry, at least for the present. Meanwhile, he was enabled to place to account a sum equal to nearly one-third of Cousins' debt. Thus he had crossed the fatal line which divides the mere bankrupt from the felon ; but his conscience did not want for palliatives. He seemed even to breathe more freely than before.

But a watchful eye had detected his movements. Carrell sought a private interview with Gray that night. A week later he had become a junior partner in the great house of Barnardiston and Company.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ARTHUR GRAY'S PARTNER.

ARTHUR GRAY dreaded his new partner, but he was compelled to trust him. In his unhappy position there was no other in whom he dared confide. He knew that he was in his power; but he had made it his interest to serve him, and keep secret the position of the bank. He wanted an instrument that could aid him in these matters as the devoted Edmunds had done. On the whole, he could not hope for more faithful service than from this man, whose ambition had suggested to him to take advantage of his discoveries. If he could in some way involve him in these dark transactions in which he had now engaged, he reflected, the security for his fidelity would be still greater. His scheme was well imagined; but Carrell saw through it. He refused to be a party to the conversion of property not legitimately belonging to the bank.

Thenceforth Gray perceived that his new partner, instead of being a pliant tool, promised

to become his master. The position became almost intolerable. His degradation was even greater than that which he had endured from Cousins' dictation. To what extent, he asked himself, would this man, who was now in a position to consign him to a criminal prison, employ the power he had obtained? He was watchful, intelligent, unscrupulous. Gray could be sure of nothing except that he would not venture on a step which would bring ruin on the bank, for such a course would destroy that sudden good fortune which had fallen in his way.

So he resolved to pursue the dangerous path on which he had entered; to take upon himself alone the responsibility of those frauds by which he hoped, like a desperate gambler, to retrieve the fortunes of the house. But his heart was heavy the while. One day he entered a chemist's shop in a neighbourhood where there was little chance of his being detected, and obtained, on a plausible excuse, a small dose of a subtle poison, which the chemist placed in a phial, labelled and sealed. From that time he carried this phial with him constantly. At night in his room, or by day when he chanced to be alone, he would take this phial sometimes from his pocket, and contemplate it with a

ghastly smile. 'It will save me from the worst,' he thought.

Only a few days after Carrell's discovery, Cousins was surprised by receiving from Gray a note to the effect that he was prepared to reduce his debt by ten thousand pounds. Cousins accepted the money, and cancelled obligations to that amount. His creditor had even offered to make arrangements for speedily reducing the debt still further. Cousins was well content, but he wondered. When he learnt that the man whom he had secretly introduced into the house—the occupant of the miserable garret, whose poverty had driven him only a few months before to the most desperate resolves—had been promoted to the position of a junior partner in the house of Barnardiston and Company, he wondered still more. These facts were surely connected in some way, but how? Had this man become a tool in some transactions by which heavy sums could be raised? He resolved to wait awhile and observe.

Cousins had only that day determined to strip off the mask and call on Carrell, under the threats which it would be impossible for him to despise, to procure him certain information relative to the position of the bank.

But his imagination was now fired by a far more promising expedient. If they had indeed discovered a plan for paying off debts so heavy even in those desperate circumstances in which Gray had lately been placed, their plan of operations must be worth knowing.

Cousins determined to allow the affair to ripen. He shrank from alarming his victim while he was engaged in a task so onerous as that of paying off a debt of thirty-five thousand pounds. While Gray kept his word, of which his first instalment of the money was so good an earnest, it was impossible that either he or his strange partner could be better employed for Cousins' interest. The debt once paid, Gray would believe himself out of the power of the bill-discounter ; but Cousins' far-seeing mind discerned prospects of turning the troubles of Barnardiston's house to still further advantage. In a little while the man whom he had placed in the bank could not fail to be far better informed than he had hitherto been in all those matters which Cousins was curious to know. Thus, while performing the part of partner in the bank, he would be secretly his agent, bound to him body and soul—compelled, under penalties from which the sternest might recoil, to do his bidding, and betray to him the secrets

which Gray would believe to be safe in his keeping.

Carrell's saving habits had not left him, but it was impossible that the new partner in Barnardiston's could continue to live in a wretched garret in Marylebone. He removed to elegant chambers in the Albany, consisting of a sitting-room, bedroom, dressing-room, and ante-chamber. Grindley deplored at first this removal from the scene of their first acquaintance, but he soon learnt to accommodate himself to the change. He rejoiced in his companion's success more than if it had been his own. Of the means by which it had been attained he knew nothing, nor was he curious. He had performed his part in watching Gray blindly, mechanically. That Carrell desired it was enough to inspire him with zeal and perseverance which he had never yet shown in affairs of his own. He was content to be allowed to sit in the faint reflection of the glory which had fallen upon the late companion of his misery. Carrell retained for him, at the old man's request, both the garrets in which they had suffered so much; but Grindley spent his evenings at the Albany. The porter of the place took him for a clerk or confidential servant of the gentleman who had

lately taken up his abode there. Grindley indeed, had no ambition beyond that of being permitted to serve Carrell in any capacity, however humble.

Sometimes the old man would recall the strange circumstance of his old fellow-lodger's poverty and misery, and would wonder at those mysterious signs which he had discovered. But Carrell never conversed with Grindley on the subject of his past life, and the old man did not venture to hint at his discovery. He was grateful if his new master would talk with him; but when he seemed moody and abstracted he would withdraw to the little ante-chamber, there to read and take snuff and pass his time as in the old days of his solitary life. About an hour after dusk of those long summer days, he would steal away to his humble lodging, where he let himself in with a key as of old.

Carrell knew nothing of those palliating circumstances which Gray could plead for the evil courses into which he was drifting. He had no knowledge of the history of the bank—of those embarrassments which Gray had inherited from his predecessors, and which had finally driven him into his fatal relations with Cousins of May Fair. In the proud banker, who accepted the

world's respect while he secretly appropriated the wealth which was not his own, he saw only a fresh evidence of the baseness of the world around him, and a new stimulus to his determination to turn the vices and the follies of those with whom he came in contact to his own account. Gray's concessions had not conciliated him, while the banker's attempt to involve him in active participation in new frauds, for the manifest purpose of injuring him in the future, had filled him with a secret dislike. Gray's conduct towards the Stapletons appeared to him in the light of another illustration of his base and crafty nature. He was deceiving them as to his position in the world, availing himself of Laura's love to entrap the woman whom so many regarded with favour.

But this affair did not concern him. He had been too much engrossed with his own schemes to give more than a passing thought to the cottage at Byfleet, and that bright vision which had met him in the woods. He had fulfilled the promise he had given her; but, at least, had discovered nothing of the kind which the lady's jealousy had expected. The effect which her beauty and her arts of fascination had exercised over him for awhile was lost in the excitement of these more momentous events. He forgot

the blandishments of those rides among the firs; the strange fear with which she had inspired him; her artful confidences; her impulsive appeals for his aid; her tender complaints; her sudden transitions of feeling; her reproaches and her tears. He had escaped from the influence of the siren, and her power seemed at an end.

But what these things could not effect, that malignant envy which had become one of the strongest passions of his soul, promised to accomplish.

Gray ceased to despatch him to Byfleet. He dreaded him now too much to entrust him with a mission so delicate. He shuddered at the thought that this man, who had spied into his secret soul and discovered its baseness, should have been in frequent contact with the woman whom he loved. He knew not what word might have dropped—what subtle sign might have conveyed to Laura or her mother an indication of his guilt and of the true reason of his mysterious absence. In his suspicious mind there was something in the manner of Laura and her mother which seemed to confirm these fears. Emboldened by the nearer prospect of escape from Cousins' control, he now visited them oftener. They regarded him more

coldly than ever. Mrs. Stapleton even enquired after Joyce in a manner which seemed to him significant. Gray explained his absence by the fact that he had now become a partner in the house, and that his aid could not with delicacy be asked for such a mission. But the excuse was too transparent to inspire faith. His services had always been confidential, and were such as might be rendered by an intimate friend, such as a secretary promoted to a partnership, and a participation, however small, in the profits of the banking-house, might be expected to be. If his secretary had served him faithfully, why were his visits now dispensed with? If he had been unfaithful, how could they explain his apparent rise in favour? These arguments did not fail to strike the experienced mother, and to convince her more strongly than ever that Philip Joyce was cognisant of some things which it was important for them to know.

Meanwhile, Carrell took note of his sudden silence upon the subject of the inhabitants of the cottage at Fir Vale. He knew well the days when Gray visited Byfleet. A certain approach to cheerfulness in his manner was visible in him at times, which could not fail to strike an observer so watchful. The recollection of his own wild passion for Isabel Frere stole upon

him. A sort of jealousy of the joy which he saw in this man oppressed him. He had fallen to a state in which the sight of happiness in another of a kind which had been denied to him, filled him with evil passions. One day, when Gray departed in this way, he looked after him as he passed down the street, and felt towards him a hatred more bitter than he had ever felt before.

‘What has this man done,’ he thought, ‘to deserve that the woman whom he loves should return his passion tenfold?’

He fixed his eyes upon the banker's figure until he disappeared in the distance. The thought that he held this man's destiny in his hand—that a word from him might ruin him in the estimation of the Stapletons—yielded him a malignant pleasure, like that which he had felt in contemplating his power to destroy the odious Jackson during his visit to the guard-ward.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SNARES.

CARRELL's habit of brooding upon these things grew stronger. His curiosity to know when Gray visited the Stapletons became an absorbing passion. He employed Grindley again to watch at the station where Gray, rendered more confident by long freedom from surveillance, failed to observe his presence. Grindley was happy enough to be employed in any service by the man whose favour was his sole thought. He brought him frequent reports of Gray's appearance at Vauxhall.

The old man was pleased with his success, until he saw that the intelligence which he procured rendered his employer more thoughtful and reserved. 'He does not like to know that the banker goes that way,' he thought. Grindley was shrewd enough in matters that concerned Carrell's interest. He struck out himself a device for rendering his news more palatable. One day he took care that Gray should observe him. The plan took effect. The banker had

not yet lost his terror of discovery. This new proof, as it appeared to him, that Cousins was on the watch disturbed him. He had contemplated a secret marriage with Laura Stapleton, but the thought that even if they were married he dared not visit her, deterred him. It would be better to postpone their union than to have to confess to his bride that his unhappy circumstances would compel him to absent himself from her society, and to visit her with even greater stealth than he had lately practised.

He made excuses again, and for awhile the Stapletons saw him less frequently. Grindley reported this fact to Carrell, who did not know the cause.

One morning he received a note from Mrs. Stapleton, marked 'private,' and asking him to call upon her in Hertford Street. The flowers had reappeared in the balconies and verandahs of their well-known house. The Stapletons had returned for a short period, determined to face the demands of creditors, or silence them as best they might. This step had become necessary as a hint to Laura's lover, and a manifesto against his policy of delay.

Carrell went. The lady saw him in her drawing-room. He looked anxiously for any sign of Laura's presence; but he noted none.

He was disappointed. His envy of Arthur Gray's good fortune was rapidly changing to an interest in Laura Stapleton which was dangerous.

The artful mother congratulated him on his progress in the banking-house; regretted that it had prevented their having the pleasure of seeing him at Fir Vale; thanked him for his kindness to Laura, and ended by inviting him to a concert to take place in their drawing-room in a few days. She knew that Arthur Gray would hear of this, but she was glad of the opportunity of piquing him.

Carrell was present at the concert. The performances of the distinguished amateurs whom he heard there interested him little. His thoughts were fixed on Laura Stapleton. The world of fashion, so long deprived of their chief attraction, gathered round her more assiduously than ever. He saw her now in that sphere in which she shone to most advantage. Skelterdale was there, admiring from a distance. Mrs. Stapleton sat beside Carrell for awhile, and pointed out to him that notorious young nobleman about whom she whispered confidentially. But Laura was too much engaged with old acquaintances to bestow more than one smile of recognition upon the new partner in Barnardiston's house.

When the concert was ended and the company departing, Mrs. Stapleton touched her new friend upon the shoulder, and whispered, 'You will stay awhile and see Laura. She wished to speak to you ; but this crowd prevented her.'

Carrell was eager to comply. He stayed long with the Stapletons that night. It was the first time that he had associated with mother and daughter on an equal footing. More than once Mrs. Stapleton left them together for a short time on some excuse. She knew well that she could trust to Laura's judgment. What would not one of those young men of fashion who had hardly cast a glance upon the stranger guest—what would not the unhappy Skelterdale have given to have been the hero of those delightful tête-à-têtes? Laura had never looked more beautiful than that night. The excitement of the evening entertainment had given a faint flush to her face, and slightly disarranged her masses of fair hair ; but these things detracted something from the formality of the evening toilette, and added a grace of which she herself was fully conscious.

They talked of Fir Vale and the cottage, and of the beautiful sylvan scenery in that neighbourhood. Then she reproached him for not visiting them there. 'And this,' she said,

dropping her full blue eyes with well-practised effect, 'reminds me of your philosophy which you preached once so effectually when we were riding in those woods.'

'I have not forgotten,' he interposed.

'Nor I,' replied Laura. 'Ah, me! I was foolish then. I was weak enough to confide to you some things which pride should have forbidden me to tell. But I was unhappy. I longed for a friend, and I thought I could rely on you. At least, I had no other; except mamma of course, who is but a woman, and sees the world only with woman's eyes. You said that idle people torment themselves with imaginary troubles: and that there is nothing one need fear in this world but loss of liberty, subjection to the will of tyrants, poverty, and dependence, and the like.'

'And you,' interrupted Carrell, 'thought that a narrow view of life; but are no longer of that opinion.'

She laughed a scornful little laugh, and stamped impatiently with her tiny foot upon the ground. 'I am wiser now,' she said. 'I have been trifled with, treated like a toy, to be played with or cast away with every idle mood of a man whom I once thought the soul of honour. But this folly is gone.'

She pronounced the word 'honour' with a marked emphasis, and with a scornful curl of the lip, which Carrell observed.

Mrs. Stapleton heard this conversation from the supper-room, and approved. Its tone, indeed, had been suggested by herself. 'Our young friend,' she said, 'is gloomy, cynical, reserved. In order to lead men, you must adopt their humour.'

Carrell fell easily into this snare. 'There is no honour in the world,' he said. 'The very word is an invention of knaves, who palm their chivalrous notions upon honest men for their own gain.'

'You tempt me to think so,' said Laura reproachfully, 'for even you have failed to keep your word.'

'In what, madam?' he asked.

'You promised to befriend me, to ascertain for me the secret of Arthur's long fits of absence.'

'I have done my best in your service,' he replied. 'I have used, even, means which rogues who desire to escape detection call base and dishonourable. I have employed spies to dog his footsteps; but have discovered nothing you would care to hear.'

'Pardon. I did you an injustice,' she said.

‘This was indeed a friend’s service. But are you sure; had I no rival?’

Carrell’s face flushed, and she perceived it. ‘Are you still so anxious on that score?’ he asked.

‘Only for vengeance,’ she exclaimed with a sudden earnestness which was not feigned. ‘Those whom I have scorned and rejected have treated me with respect. Am I so tame a spirit, do you think, as to submit to coldness and neglect from one whom I once loved, and to whom I was weak enough to show my folly?’

Carrell became after this a frequent visitor in Hertford Street. Sometimes he saw Laura; but rarely for a long time. Mrs. Stapleton held the keys of that paradise, and only admitted whom she pleased, or indulged them with a glimpse of the houri within in such a manner as suited best her plans. She had satisfied herself that her young visitor was really enthralled in that snare in which so many had struggled hopelessly. But Carrell’s newly awakened love for Laura Stapleton differed from that of all her other admirers. It was based originally in evil, and the taint had clung to it. It was a passion which did not raise or purify his nature like that wild, hopeless dream of love with which he had regarded Isabel Frere. Some-

thing in the tone and manner, both of the mother and the daughter, had struck him as false and unreal. He even felt towards Laura a semblance of that dread which had so mysteriously stolen upon him on their first chance meeting. He was not altogether the dupe of her wiles. Her baseness in inducing him to play the spy upon her lover was not greater than his own in making himself the instrument of her designs; but in his eyes it did not degrade her the less. She fascinated him, but her fascination was like that of the woman in the old legend, whose serpent origin is never quite concealed. He felt instinctively that she was selfish and worldly, like those about her, hard and merciless as those maxims in which he delighted, yet he loved her still. His own nature was too debased to make such a love impossible. His habit of worshipping something which he knew to be unworthy even of his respect sank him lower and lower, and brought with it its own peculiar retribution. He scorned himself for his weakness, yet grew daily more and more restless when he did not see her, and watched for signs of Gray's return to favour with a deeper envy of his rival.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HOUSE IN HERTFORD STREET.

THE affairs of the Stapletons were becoming daily more and more desperate. The little remains of property which the mother possessed was not readily saleable. Her unsuccessful attempts to obtain further advances from Cousins on the faith of her daughter's relations with Arthur Gray, had warned her that it was useless to look for further aid in that quarter. Time was slipping away; creditors were growing still more urgent. It required all the mother's tact to appease them for awhile and prevent their clamours reaching the ear of the world. But even her shrewdness failed to suggest to her any ready way of extricating themselves from their embarrassment. Gray's strange conduct, indeed, was far more difficult to deal with than if he had openly avowed himself unfaithful. A lover who declares himself as ardently attached as ever, who even talks of marriage as the most cherished object of his life, and yet delays to ask his intended bride to fix a day for their union,

is a case not easily dealt with by a schemer of Mrs. Stapleton's class. She had hoped that Carrell, won over to their cause by the daughter's arts, would have been able to discover for them some evidence of infidelity which would have furnished an excuse for a rupture. He had hitherto failed her in this; but she still looked for some information which would give them a means of throwing the onus of a quarrel upon him.

He was evidently fascinated by her confidences; it was certain, indeed, that he was in love with her, and jealous of Gray. Her complaints of her lover's neglect, and her final avowal that she had ceased to have any regard for him, were well calculated to encourage him to entertain such a passion. Mrs. Stapleton saw in this position of affairs nothing to regret. She felt that he dared not betray them; but if he did, it would matter little. Those secret tête-à-têtes, those confidences in the woods at Byfleet, happily left no record behind. Gray would probably set down any disclosures which had no evidence to support them but his young partner's word, merely to vanity, or the ill-feeling of a hopeless rival. But her chief support was the fact that she had no longer any fear of Gray's anger. She had pointed out to Laura

often enough the probable advantages of a quarrel with her lover; 'but then, my dear,' she would add, 'we must be careful that the anger shall be all on his side.'

Mrs. Stapleton knew that there was Colonel Hawker still ready to adore her daughter on the first token of repentance for that harshness she had shown him. Even Skelterdale, though wild and penniless, and out of favour with his relations, could yet bestow upon her a title which would dazzle the world about them. But the affair with Arthur Gray had gone too far to be relinquished without some advantage. If she could but be sure that his protestations were merely intended to conceal a diminished regard—if she might but have looked into the heart of the man, who at times seemed so happy in her daughter's society, and at other times so gloomy and reserved—her plans would have been simpler. 'This man may desert you, dear,' she would say to her daughter; 'but he can never permit this affair to be proclaimed to the world—the scandal would be too great; and has not a very good authority assured us that Arthur's letters alone are equal to a fortune?'

These arguments in favour of caution and of patience were unanswerable; but, meanwhile, the wolf was at the door. It was impossible to

explain to vulgar and angry tradespeople the nature of these securities for the ultimate liquidation of their claims. Their clamours had only been prevented from being audible to visitors in the drawing-room by the skilful management of a trusty servant, who took care to hear their complaints in a private room, to which he invited them at the first sign of an explosion, with the air of a man who has a treasure within, from which he is only too anxious to satisfy all just claims.

Carrell was one afternoon a witness to a scene of this kind ; but the creditor in this case had already had experience of the deceitful tactics of the bland Prescott, and, being armed by the law with peculiar powers above those of every other kind of claimant, he proceeded then and there to put those powers in force, in a manner which was highly inconvenient to the lady of the house. In fact, the creditor on this occasion was the representative of Mrs. Stapleton's landlord, a stern, uncompromising house-agent, who knew nothing about Miss Stapleton's matrimonial prospects, did not move at all in the fashionable world, and was anxious for nothing but to stand well in the eyes of an absentee employer. He had come attended by two shabby-looking men, who waited at a slight

distance from the house until their leader had satisfied himself that his demands were not likely to be complied with without stringent measures. Then he walked out on to the steps of the house, and beckoning to his attendants, bade them do their duty.

It happened that Carrell arrived at the door at that moment, having just left the banking-house, and heard the dialogue between the bland domestic and this ruthless creditor. He was also a spectator of the unceremonious behaviour of the broker and his men, who had already made their way into the dining-room, and begun to prepare what is known as an inventory of the furniture and effects of that charming residence. The faithful servant conveyed this sad intelligence to Mrs. Stapleton.

‘Where is Laura?’ she asked.

‘Miss Stapleton rode out at half-past five, madam,’ replied Prescott.

‘That is well,’ said the mother. ‘We must hide this from her as long as we can.’

‘I am afraid it is too late to prevent its becoming known, madam,’ replied Prescott. ‘Mr. Joyce of Barnardiston and Company is below.’

‘Did Mr. Joyce hear your altercation with these ruffians?’ she asked, but with no sign of anxiety.

Heard everything, madam,' rejoined the servant. 'He came up at that very moment, and the men blustered so much, the whole street might have heard them.'

'Ah!' exclaimed his mistress, 'it cannot be helped. Show him up.'

Mrs. Stapleton had determined to make the best of this accident. 'He has discovered our troubles,' she thought; 'it will be better to ask his assistance than appeal to another.'

Carrell found her in tears, which had begun to flow copiously as soon as Prescott had left her.

'Laura must not know of this for the world,' she exclaimed; 'it would break her heart. Oh, Mr. Joyce, can I rely on you not to expose our sorrows to the world?'

Her visitor assured her that she need be under no fear on that account.

'It is my folly,' she said, 'not Laura's. I have been extravagant, foolish; but our embarrassments, I hope, will be brief. I have property, but the lawyers are so slow getting one money. I would not have Mr. Gray hear of this on any account.'

Her visitor was too much infatuated with Laura to miss this opportunity of doing the Stapletons a service.

‘Let me be your creditor here,’ he said. ‘With your leave I will dismiss these fellows.’ Carrell went below, and gave the stern agent an undertaking to pay the rent on the morrow. With the signature of Mr. Joyce of Barnardiston’s affixed to the memorandum, the agent, who longed for the patronage of that great house of business, declared himself satisfied. The intruders had vanished before Laura returned.

These affairs drew closer. Carrell’s relations with the Stapletons. Mrs. Stapleton became indebted to her young friend on other occasions for assistance; but this was in secret, for pecuniary matters were never noticed in Laura’s presence. In return, however, Mrs. Stapleton allowed him more frequent glimpses of Laura’s beauty. Gray knew nothing of this. He visited them rarely, and only in the morning, when less intimate acquaintances did not dare to intrude upon the young lady or her mother. Carrell began to believe that their relations were at an end.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LAURA STAPLETON.

SHORTLY after the events recorded in the last chapter, the Stapletons returned once more to the cottage at Fir Vale. The season was drawing to a close in town, and their absence this time was little noted. In truth, Mrs. Stapleton had grown weary of the humiliations which she had been compelled to endure in Hertford Street, and was glad to take refuge for a while in that retreat where no landlords harassed, or tradespeople importuned at the doors.

Carrell had heard nothing of their intention to depart. He learnt it first from the old domestic, who informed him that they had gone that morning into the country, and that the time of their return was uncertain.

Gray had appeared in unusual spirits that day. Carrell doubted little that this arose from the prospect of visiting Laura in that delightful home which he had provided for her. He felt bitter towards the man who now stood between him and the object of his passion ; but he was

more incensed with Laura. She had flirted with him lately to a degree which gave him a right to complain of a departure so secret. He determined to go down to Byfleet, and ascertain by the evidence of his own eyes whether his suspicion was well founded. He was in a bitter mood. He had resolved to avow openly his love for Laura Stapleton ; if necessary, to quarrel with Gray, and call on him to relinquish his claim to the hand of a woman who hated him for the insults he had cast upon her.

Gray's spirits, however, had risen from another cause. He saw now an immediate prospect of escaping from the thralldom of Cousins. Great crimes like his are generally hedged round with a sophistry which makes their worst features invisible to the eyes of the evil-doer. He had drawn out a scheme, based on the profits of the bank, for redeeming all those slips from the path of honesty ; and he thought he saw his way to safety. The man who had so cunningly taken advantage of his position would be silent, he thought, for the sake of that great prize which he had obtained. As to the securities which he thus disposed of, if exposure could be postponed, it would not be difficult to replace them by equivalent amounts of similar stock. Meanwhile, his frauds, though danger-

ous, relieved him from the terrible power of Cousins to monopolise those gains, which were the sole source from which he could hope to improve the position of the bank. As to Laura Stapleton, he was too blind to perceive the truth of Cousins' warnings. He set them down to the cunning of that unscrupulous money-lender, and his avowed desire to involve him in more sordid schemes for his advancement, as well as for the security of his debt.

Gray was engaged in these calculations on the very evening that Carrell went down to Byfleet and found Laura Stapleton walking in the garden alone. The discovery that his rival was not there appeased him. Laura received him, as was her wont, with more ease and familiarity in that solitude than she ever ventured to show in town. He dined with the Stapletons that evening, and the wily mother almost hoped that Gray might have visited them and made the discovery of Carrell's visit. But he did not come.

It was a lovely day in the month of August, with a cloudless sky. The dining-room, with its long French windows, opened on to the lawn, where the grotesque shadow of the Swiss cottage, lengthening out until it touched the shrubberies beyond, cast a delicious coolness. A stone terrace, lined with tall flowering plants in ele-

gant Chinese jars, bounded the gardens and separated them from the commencement of the fir-woods. Carrell and Laura walked on this terrace together until sunset, talking of many things. She had never before appeared more worldly, had never avowed evil passions with more cynical frankness. She spoke with scorn of that generosity which moralists inculcate, laughed at the folly of ardent love, sneered at the cant of those who preach forgiveness of injuries. She was indeed changed from the young lady who had ridden with him in the woods, while combating so energetically his sombre views of life. He recoiled from the image of his own misanthropy ; but while he half dreaded her he was intoxicated with her presence. Before he left her that evening he avowed his love for her.

Laura affected surprise. 'Why, this is the very folly that I preached against,' she said ; 'I commend you to your own maxims for the cure of such weakness.' And she turned as if to leave him.

But her new lover was in no mood for trifling. 'I am in earnest,' he said, as he held her small white hand in his. 'You shall not go until you have answered me in the same spirit.'

'What if I answer as earnestly that I have

given my heart once, and though I have been deceived, humiliated, trifled with, can never love again?’

‘It is impossible!’ exclaimed her companion. ‘Your pride would forbid you to own that you still cherish a love that finds no return. What is there in this man, that he should have the power to degrade you to that point?’

Laura Stapleton looked up as she leaned slightly with one arm upon the balustrade of the terrace, and regarding him steadfastly with her clear blue eyes, answered calmly—

‘Nothing.’

‘Then shake off this influence,’ he urged.

‘I will be frank,’ she answered, without withdrawing her gaze or flinching in the least. ‘You have taught me that it is not worth while to conceal one’s thoughts. He is rich, and we are poor. That is all.’

Carrell’s face flushed. He could have met her with a ready answer to that selfish avowal, but he shrank from betraying the secrets of the bank.

‘Riches,’ he said, ‘might fail to make you happy.’

Laura laughed. ‘It is too late,’ she replied, ‘to talk to me in that vein. If I said I scorned

wealth, cared nothing for a fine house, for silks, and jewels, and horses, and those things in which a woman's heart delights, would you believe me now ?'

He avoided answering her question directly. 'Is it for this only,' he said, 'that you still cling to the man whom you despise ?'

'Why should it not be ?'

'Your self-respect forbids it.'

'A foolish notion. My self-respect requires that I should not be the dupe of one whom, as you say, I despise. Besides, if there is to be a dupe, I prefer that he should be mine.'

'In what way ?'

'I might decline to recognise your quality of father-confessor. Can you tell me why I should not ?'

'Your frankness drew the question from me involuntarily. I withdraw it if it offends.'

She hesitated a moment. 'I have few reasons,' she said, 'for being reserved with you. I will tell you at least this much. Mr. Gray's love is no more to me than this shrivelled leaf.' She plucked a leaf from a plant as she spoke, and crushing it in her little hand, dropped it over the balustrade into the ha-ha which enclosed the garden like a moat on the side of

the wood. 'He has listened to calumnies about me,' she continued. 'He has been told that I am extravagant, heartless. He has not the courage to renounce me, yet avows himself reluctant to present me to the world as his wife. Think of this, and ask yourself what but his power to give me wealth and position in society could induce me still to hold him to his promise? Besides, I am piqued, and, being piqued, will have my way.'

The voice of Mrs. Stapleton calling to Laura interrupted their tête-à-tête at this point. Carrell had only time to whisper—

'We must speak further upon this. Will you see me here again?'

'If you will.'

'To-morrow?'

'As you please.'

He rode away from the house at dusk, but not through the woods.

Grindley loitered about the entrance to the Albany that night in expectation of his return—for in Carrell's absence he rarely ventured to enter the chambers—but he did not come. The next morning he enquired there by times. Cousins knew nothing of his relations with Carrell at the Albany, and Grindley had good

reasons for not presenting himself at the bank. That evening found him again on the watch ; but still there was no sign. The old man's anxiety was great, but he dared not communicate it to anyone. -

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